Internet

Web 2.0 & Libraries: Best practices for social software – a book review

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This is a review of a Library Technology Report produced last year by the American Library Association, entitled *Web 2.0 & Libraries: Best Practices for Social Software*, written by Michael Stephens. This report comprises sixty-eight pages and presents a chapter about each of five of the most common forms of social software that make up the Web 2.0 environment, and considers the how, whys and why nots of using each one within a library environment.

The author, Michael Stephens, is a well-known figure in US library circles, primarily for his advocacy of the possible uses library systems can make of emerging technologies, most recently centering on uses of Web 2.0 technologies. He writes for the ALA TechSource Blog[1], as well as for his own blog – Tame the Web[2].

The Introduction is entitled 'Creating conversations, connections and community', and outlines the subject scope of the report, some of the various influences on the author, and some words of encouragement to those considering using Web 2.0 tools. The key message is to remember the title of the introduction and evaluate which of these tools can help create conversations in your library system.

The first chapter provides background to Web 2.0, and some context to their use in libraries, for although it can feel like Web 2.0 has just arrived, some of the tools have been around for a while. This is an American publication, and so there are plenty of examples provided of librarians engaging with these technologies, and the opportunities and challenges they faced. This section also focuses on such concepts as openness, connectedness, participation and ease of use. There is also a look at the skills needed by librarians to be able to implement these technologies, leading, inevitably, to the moniker 'Librarian 2.0'. Stephens does draw a parallel here to the shifts in job requirements when previous new technologies were evolving, such as CD-ROM use, HTML and Internet instruction. Each of the subsequent chapters looks at one of the following: blogs, RSS, Instant Messaging, Wikis and Flickr.

Blogs are covered in some detail, particularly as they are the author's recommended place to start a Web 2.0 exploration. The first part of the chapter presents an overview of blogs within libraries of different kinds, reassuring us that they are just a software tool. The remainder of this first part is devoted to an examination of the 'Biblioblogosphere',

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[1] *ALA TechSource Blog.* (2007) Available at http://www.techsource.ala.org/blog. (Accessed: 4 March 2007)

[2] Stephens, M. (2007) *Tame the Web: Libraries and Technology* Available at http://tametheweb.com (Accessed: 4 March 2007)

which is the online blog landscape of all things related to librarians, libraries, and a growing librarian-authored community of practice; asking (and answering) questions such as "Why a blog at your library", "What can libraries and librarians do with blogs?", and "What is the social purpose of the library blog?".

The remaining parts of the chapter look at implementation and best practice for library blogs. Issues such as creating a "sense of humanity for the library", choosing software, training staff and tips for blogging success, are all touched on.

The third chapter addresses RSS feeds, both using other people's RSS feeds within a library, and a library generating RSS to push information out to library users. It shows what libraries have already achieved using RSS, and then suggests some practical steps to take to start offering and using RSS in your library. One of the key messages here is that RSS can be a great way to push out a variety of content, and that library users will find the feeds and subscribe to them, even if they are not publicised.

The following three chapters are concerned with software applications that may be regarded, in the UK at least, as more unusual candidates for use within libraries, covering Instant Messaging, wikis and Flickr. Each of these chapters gives some real world examples of how the software has been used in libraries, as well as outlining best practices and pointers to further resources to consult. The concluding chapter includes ten steps for staff buy-in for technology projects and a final librarian's reading list.

I would recommend this book for its usefulness in providing a thorough snapshot of the Web 2.0 situation, as well as a helping hand to those wanting to start out. It covers its subject area in detail, gives plenty of pointers for further reading throughout the report, and the use of quotes and examples from 'real' people provides other voices to complement that of the author.

Keep an eye out for his follow-up report, "Advanced Web 2.0 for libraries" due to be published as an ALA Library Technology Report in September 2007.

Ordering details:

Web 2.0 & Libraries: best practices for social software. Michael Stephens. *Library Technology Reports,* vol. 42, no. 4. July/August 2006. Available from http://www.techsource.ala.org/ltr/web-20-and-libraries-best-practices-for-social-software.html   (US$63)