

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

UKEIG Training Day, Edinburgh

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The day started with a cup of coffee and a biscuit in one of the training suites within the main library at the University of Edinburgh. We were then seated in front of a computer in a bright room with lots of natural light. We had already been given a folder containing a wealth of information, including fact sheets, exercises, further reading and information on other workshops, all printed on a rainbow of different coloured paper.

The UKeiG workshop on RSS, Blogs and Wikis aimed to explain the workings of these Web 2.0 technologies, to cut through the jargon and hype, and to suggest ways they can be used in a work environment. Presentations as well as practical exercises were held, so that we had time to set up and try our own tools. The workshop leader was Karen Blakeman, who was full of enthusiasm.

I knew the basics of Web 2.0 technology, but I was looking forward to increasing my understanding of how it all works. Despite the course name, Karen decided to start on blogs instead of RSS, as she felt that blogs were easier to understand. At the moment, my organisation does not have any blogs, but I have been thinking of getting one of our directors to have an internal blog to help with the two-way flow of communication between management and staff.

Karen started by explaining what a blog is, and going through the different parts of a blog. She then went on to explain where you would use a blog, what to look out for when using a blog as source of information, and how you must never ignore a blog which may contain information about your organisation. The workshop was relaxed, with lots of two-way interaction. We then moved on to the part we had all been waiting for, setting up a blog.

I used both Blogger and Wordpress to set up blogs, and found both services very easy to use. The blog I set up on Blogger appeared on a Google search within an hour of setting it up. I can now set up a blog to talk about myself and anything I am interested in. It could be useful to read if you suffer from insomnia!

We then moved onto RSS feeds, which were a bit more complicated. This part of the workshop was run in a similar way to the blogs session. I found setting up a page to receive RSS very easy in both Google and Pageflakes, but found the structure in Pageflakes much better. However, I really struggled on setting up a RSS feed on my-rss.co.uk. If I play with it a lot more I will get a better understanding of how it works. [Editor's note: UKeiG will be producing a fact sheet providing a step-by-step guide to My-RSS]. However, it has given me a few ideas of how to use it at work. RSS feeds could solve the problem of the number of emails colleagues receive.

The afternoon session kicked off with wikis. Karen informed us that Wiki Wiki means quickly in Hawaiian. Hawaii and the Web seem to have a lot in common. First we had surfing and now we have Wikis. (Wish we had the weather as well.) As Karen took us through what a wiki is and how to set them up, I was thinking of so many different ways that a wiki could help us work with colleagues. They could be used in running a project. Any papers being used within a group could be put up on a wiki for other people using the 'group amend' facility. With all the add-ons, like a to-do list, this could be the main

communication channel. The only draw back could be security. The good news is that I found wikis so interesting, I might not have time to bore you with my blog.

On the whole I found the workshop very productive, and I know that it has given my colleagues who went on the course and me a new enthusiasm to use Web 2.0 technologies to help our work.

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