Meeting Report: UKeiG Annual Seminar

Web 2.0 in action: Practical implementation in the workplace (12 June 2008)

I was intrigued when I received the meeting notification for the Group's Annual seminar. I'm quite familiar with using web 2.0 applications for fun – blogger, face-book, last.fm, MySpace etc. – but in the workplace...? Of course I was aware of the potential, but hadn't really had the time to think about it fully. So a whole day of UKeiG specialists and colleagues to discuss this with? What a perfect opportunity to make the time!

First off we heard from two Web 2.0 product vendors. Simon Gittins of Vivisimo gave a good presentation that certainly set the scene well. He started by discussing the Web 2.0 social applications, then went on to discuss more business-type applications. Clearly (as we're all aware) Web 2.0 is "changing user expectations". Younger people are coming into the workplace wanting to be able to utilise these tools as part of their work.

Simon then went on to explain the key elements of Vivisimo, which is based on a social search engine, including social tagging, social bookmarking and social networking. The most interesting point of this for me was seeing how the combination of these elements leads to the creation of an organisational expertise database. Expertise databases are something that Universities are always developing, but which become out of date as soon as they are complete. By using Web 2.0 technologies, staff could keep their profile up to date by using (and tagging) the resources of the intranet, thereby reducing the problem of dated entries. Obviously this doesn't resolve all the issues associated with expertise databases, but it did get me thinking on the topic. Simon finished his presentation with four case studies, which again real application ideas for this technology in the workplace.

The second vendor presenter was Norman Graves from Ektron Europe Limited. I was keen to hear Norman's presentation entitled: "Balancing what is achievable with what is desirable in Web 2.0 deployments". However I didn't feel like Norman really explained how to make that balance work. Much of the first part of the presentation was given over to an explanation of taxonomy, which was slightly unnecessary with the UKeiG audience. However some scene setting was needed, as Ektron appears to be a Content Management System that uses taxonomy and metadata to build profiles for the user linking all relevant data. Again, the presentation closed with case study material to illustrate the uses of the software.

In the afternoon we heard from two information practitioners – Dion Lindsay and Kara Jones. Dion gave an interesting presentation about Web 2.0 and the role of the Information Professional. In some ways the content reminded me of the previous discussions we've had as a profession when the World Wide Web was going to make us all redundant. I do think that the Dion created some interesting points about the need for change though, and there certainly was some discussion in the Q&A of the lifespan of some Web 2.0 interfaces. Kara, on the other hand, gave a very practical talk about which Web 2.0 initiatives have worked for her in the academic environment. For me, there were two important lessons to learn from Kara's experiences. Firstly, and the most obvious (but in my opinion the most missed), is the importance of matching Web 2.0 interfaces and tools against customer requirements and

institutional priorities. In other words, don't just do it because you can. Secondly, Kara reminded those of us who work in universities that social bookmarking on institutional repositories can increase citations, and therefore increase exposure. This is vital in the research environment, and clearly links back to the first lesson – know your institutional priorities.

Overall, I think the day gave everyone a lot to think about on this topic – indeed the level of noise from conversation at coffee and lunch breaks led me to believe that everyone had a lot to talk about too! Of the people I spoke to, the overall consensus seemed to be that there could be great value in using such tools in the workplace, but that there would need to be some change in attitudes from colleagues before Web 2.0 really became pervasive.

Oh, and of course, all the colleagues I spoke to were quite sure of their role as information professionals to act as catalysts, guides and mentors in support of Web 2.0 developments in their work place.

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In keeping with the practical implementation a Web 2.0 factsheet was produced by Martin White, Director of Intranet Focus and is now available on the UKeiG website. The factsheet is more a set of personal 'best bets' that can be returned to on a regular basis for information and inspiration. TK.