

Interview with Stanley Tan: A Student Winner...

Notes From My Meeting With The Winner Of The UKeiG Student Conference Grant

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Every year UKeiG offers a number of awards to students to facilitate their attendance at a library or information conference. This year – appropriately – one of the awards was won by a student wishing to attend our 2009 UKeiG Conference ‘Innovation in e-information’. The winner was Stanley Tan, currently undertaking an MSc in Information Management and Preservation at the University of Glasgow. He is visiting the UK for the ten months of his further degree from his native Singapore where he manages the outreach and education programmes at the National Archives of Singapore.

I spoke to him during the conference and asked him about his background, what had attracted him to the conference, and what he hoped to take away from it. His research interests have to do with outreach; and his interest in games, gaming and their ability to draw people together and create communities has made him wonder whether similar approaches can be used to enhance, or create new approaches to, information services. He said that games played an active part in the way in which he looked at information and archives management as he feels that very often these websites fail to attract or engage the user adequately. If games can be so successful at drawing people in and retaining them, at creating communities, shouldn't we, as information professionals, look towards games to see what we can learn from them. Whatever it is that works for games software in developing user communities should also be able to work around library and archive websites.

His dissertation is on users' reaction to archival finding aids; and some of his work has been in identifying and testing elements that are often found in a gaming environment such as discussion forums. The parallels with Web 2.0/Library2.0 approaches have not escaped him – and these were the Conference presentations which most drew him to Manchester, and which he felt would prove useful for his dissertation. Already, when I spoke to him, several papers had provided food for thought! References to the Google Generation report (<http://www.bl.uk/news/2008/pressrelease20080116.html>) in particular were relevant and he commented that his experience of that generation of users suggested that their search techniques were weak – they depend too much on Google, using just one or two keywords and trusting the results implicitly. As a part of his dissertation research he has been interviewing users (he has reached the analysis stage prior to writing up the results) and several of his interviewees fell into the Google Generation frame. While they were generally

“more savvy” in terms of Web navigation, it was clear that their use was neither sophisticated nor particularly skilled. Echoing the report’s call for a training programme on information literacy skills in schools, Stanley wondered how to fill the information literacy gap so as to make sure that skills important in the past are not forgotten. Richard Wallis’ ‘Waves of Innovation’ and Nic Price’s ‘Constant Gardener’ had also inspired, and – at the time we spoke – he was looking forward to the interaction of the breakout sessions in the hope that they would provide more food for dissertation thought!

Stanley Tan’s enthusiasm for his work in Singapore where he has responsibility for part of the Archives’ holdings as well as for connecting with its users was evident as we spoke, and it will be interesting to hear how his dissertation research feeds into his day job. Perhaps *eLucidate* can hope for a short paper from him in a year’s time!