

Meeting Reports

Online Information 2009

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I am a final year student in Information Technology at Edinburgh Napier University, with an Honours project on the use of twitter by academic librarians, and one of my lecturers, Dr Hazel Hall, recommended the Online Information 2009 conference to me as a source of valuable information and useful contacts. After looking at the event guide for the three-day conference, I found that a number of seminars and exhibitions were of particular interest to me and would directly benefit me in the study of my Honours project. Seminars entitled “Email Is Dead! The Rise of Twitter, Chat and Communities”, “Twitter: Value, Pitfalls and the Impact on the Information Professional” and “Towards the Library of the Future” fitted exactly with the theme of my Honours project and attending Online Information 2009, therefore, seemed imperative to me.

As a mature student with three children and with Christmas on the horizon, there were certain obvious barriers in my way however. I simply did not have the finances to fully fund attending Online 2009, which was being held at Olympia Grand Hall in London. That’s where UKeiG stepped in. I was advised about the student bursaries available from UKeiG and applied for help to fund a trip to London to attend Online 2009. I was delighted when I received a letter notifying me that I had been successful in my application, and that I had been awarded funds towards attending the conference. Dr Hall, who was a guest speaker and moderator at the conference, arranged with Incisive Media, the organisers of Online 2009, that I gain admittance to the conference as a steward and the funding I received from UKeiG went towards my travel and accommodation expenses. I was all set, I just had the nerves to deal with!

I flew down the evening before the conference. Although it wasn’t my first visit to London, it was the first time I had gone anywhere on my own, and I’m not a great flyer. The flight however, wasn’t as bad as my nerves had led me to expect and on arriving in London I didn’t find it nearly as daunting as I’d imagined. On arriving at the Olympia Grand Hall the following morning I was met by my lecturer, Dr Hall. I was very glad to see someone I knew as it was a bit intimidating at first. The Olympia Grand Hall is a vast exhibition and conference centre and it was bustling with people. Hazel soon put me at ease, introducing me to many of the guest speakers and providing me with invaluable networking opportunities, which I took full advantage of.

The first day of the conference was full of seminars and exhibitions, which were highly relevant to my subject area. I attended sessions from Track Two: The Social Web: Transforming the Workplace. The opening keynote address was presented by Dame Wendy Hall and Professor Nigel Shadbolt, who are highly-regarded researchers and leaders in the field of the semantic Web. This provided a valuable insight into the themes that were to be addressed throughout the three days of Online 2009. Also on this day were two of the seminars relating to Twitter which had caught my eye when I first saw the event guide. "Email Is Dead! The Rise of Twitter, Chat and Communities" and "Twitter: Value, Pitfalls and the Impact on the Information Professional" discussed how microblogging has become widespread, both socially and in large organizations, as a means of communication and information sharing, but that these technologies need to be understood in order to be fully capitalized on. The day concluded with a session in which Karen Blakeman, of RBA Information Services, gave instructions and tips for effective use of Twitter and outlined particular legal issues of interest to Twitter users.

On the second day, Hazel took me around the exhibition floor and introduced me to some of the delegates from different organizations including UKeiG. This was an opportunity for me to express my gratitude for the assistance UKeiG had given me. The exhibition floor was huge and there were so many stands and several small theatres holding smaller seminars. These were much smaller and not as intimidating as in the conference rooms. There was a very relaxed atmosphere there and the seminars were short, only lasting around half an hour, which allowed me to attend a few. Again the guest speakers made themselves available for questions, although I didn't ask questions during the audience question time. I did go up to some of the speakers after they had finished and introduced myself and they answered any questions I had and gave me their contact details should I require any further information. Of the main seminars, Track Three was of excellent value to me, with guest speakers Professor Blaise Cronin and Ellyssa Kroski speaking about libraries of the future. I was able to meet both guest speakers and discuss a few things with Ellyssa Kroski in particular, whose work I had referenced as part of my literature review for my Honours project.

On the final day I attended seminars from Track Two: The Social Web: Transforming the Workplace. The opening keynote address was by Charlene Li, co author of *Groundswell: Winning In A World Transformed By Social Technologies*, and a leading authority on the use of social technologies by organisations. The speech addressed the impact of social media in the professional world, which again provided an invaluable insight and helped not only with my Honours project but particularly with my study of knowledge management. I also took the opportunity to visit the Interconnect library stand on the last day and when I explained that I was a student looking for a book on twitters use in libraries, the staff were very helpful and gave me a selection of books to help with my project free of

charge. I was extremely grateful for this, as I would never have been able to afford, or even find these books otherwise.

Attending the Online Information 2009 Conference provided me with an invaluable opportunity to network with information professionals and to learn from their experience. Each seminar I attended provided different expert opinions and ideas, which I might not have been able to discover had I not been able to attend the conference. Everyone was extremely friendly and welcoming, and the experience provided me with the opportunity to learn from professionals in the information industry. I feel better equipped with the knowledge and information skills needed to move forward with my project and my degree course. The entire experience has given me a much needed confidence boost and has invigorated and enthused me for a career as an information professional. I look forward to attending more conferences such as this. I would like to sincerely thank UKeIG and Incisive Media for allowing me this fantastic opportunity, and I assure them that I will make best use of the experience and information I gained from this.