Web 2.0

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Web 2.0 and social media tools are changing the Internet landscape, not least of which with regards to websites. This column will look at that challenge, providing some examples and consider the fact that searchers now need to look much more widely for their data than ever before.

Rather ironically, for a column that's looking at Web 2.0 resources and concepts, I'd like to start with something that's very much Web 1.0, and that's the website. We're all very familiar with websites, and for many people, that's still what the Web is. I still hear lots of people talking about their websites; improving them, getting higher rankings for them with search engines, and more broadly, people talk about searching for a website that they can use. Even on a very trite level, many people will have their website address on their business card as a main point of contact.

Now, I don't deny that websites are still very important – of course they are – but they are really only one part, and an increasingly small part at that, of the presence an organization should have on the Web. One of the most important things that Web 2.0 resources have allowed us to do is to walk some way away from the website, and to start using other tools in conjunction. I think that increasingly a website needs to have an entire satellite of other resources surrounding it, and as information professionals we have to consider this from two different angles. Firstly, if we have any input into the development of a Web presence (and not too long ago that would have been 'website'), it's important to remember all of the extra elements that need to be included in a blended approach, particularly so that it's possible to update the content on a site quickly and easily using third-party resources. Secondly, when we're looking for information it's important to bear in mind that just looking for data on webpages, or indeed just looking for websites, doesn't really work any longer, and a search that is limited to just that will increasingly fail to return useful, valid and most importantly current data.

Consequently, let's take a look at a few of the ways in which data can be blended into a website using some of the common Web 2.0 tools (or in some cases concepts) that we have at our disposal.

News and updating

If you have a library website, or more realistically some library webpages, you need to be able to update them quickly. If you can't update your webpages in a few seconds I would contend

that you don't have anything other than an attractive brick wall. Perhaps the quickest and most effective way to update a page is to use Twitter. The media hype would of course have you believe that the resource is of no value other than to find out what a celebrity had for breakfast, but those of us who use it on a regular basis are aware that it's an extraordinarily useful tool; one that can be used in many different ways. Twitter is an effective broadcast tool, and one that doesn't require you to follow lots of people or indeed be followed back. There are many widgets that allow you to take 'tweets' and send them on to another resource.

Hidden at the bottom of the Twitter home page is a link charmingly entitled 'Goodies'. This in turn takes you to a page of widgets, and one of those is a Profile Widget (http://twitter.com/goodies/widget_profile). Once you have chosen the preferences, appearance and dimensions it can then be cut and pasted into the HTML of a webpage. When new tweets are added they are reflected in the widget. Consequently, if the library is going to be closed due to bad weather a quick tweet to that effect can be made, and you can return to bed safe in the knowledge that the page has been updated to warn people not to try and visit. Of course, the widget could be used for anything that you want to broadcast – closing time, new books, links to useful sites and so on. When I visit sites I am increasingly on the lookout for a Twitter feed so that I can see exactly what the organization or individual is doing.

Another approach is to use one of the bookmarking services that are available, such as Delicious at http://del.icio.us and the widget that they provide via an RSS feed can also be very useful. By carefully choosing tags to append to bookmarked pages and resources it's possible to update individual pages with targeted content. One of the pages on my own site that provides information on Twitter (http://www.philb.com/twitter.htm) also has a collection of items that I've bookmarked in Delicious which have 'twitter' as a tag. Since my Delicious feed isn't updated as often as my Twitter stream there is slightly more longevity in the links, and therefore used accordingly.

A weblog can also be pulled into service in like fashion. Resources such as Feed Informer allow you to take an RSS feed and place it onto a webpage. When the blog is updated, so is the content in the widget and on the webpage. Obviously, since the link will be going to a blog post the content can be more in-depth and informative.

Images

It's odd to think that when Sir Tim Berners-Lee first started developing the World Wide Web he didn't give a great deal of thought to images, given that they are such an integral part of the Internet as we now know it. If I need to find images for whatever purpose the first place that I invariably go is to Flickr and an advanced search for images made available under a

Creative Commons licence. I'll then explore further to find groups, discussions and experts in different areas – Flickr is a great social media tool based on images, but it's much more than that.

As well as being a useful image search engine your own images can easily be embedded on webpages, in blog posts, linked to via Twitter and so on. Flickr badges can display the most recent photographs in an account and if placed on a webpage/blog etc. can provide searchers with an easy way to find more information about your organisation. There are also many different resources such as BigHugeLabs (http://bighugelabs.com/) which let you do interesting things with your images; posters, mosaics, jigsaws and so on.

Collaborative tools

There are plenty of times when you want to produce content in conjunction with colleagues in other companies, in which case a wiki may be what is required. Link from your site to a wiki and back in order to give people an opportunity to add their own content, or simply to read what others have written. The advantage given by a wiki is simplicity – users can create webpages with embedded content without having to learn HTML. The content can be updated real time, without waiting for content to be added by a technical support person.

Equally it's always worth looking for wikis to see if there are any that cover the area of interest that you have; the Library Success (A best practices wiki) at http://www.libsuccess.org/ is a good example of how librarians are collaborating with colleagues to provide a 'one-stop' shop for ideas and information for each other. Next time you need to research something, see if there's a wiki for it.

Social networking

With 450 million users it's hard to ignore Facebook, although many people are trying their best to! Although blocked in many workplaces, Facebook is a good resource to use to search for current trends, and although I wouldn't necessarily trust the content in detail it's often a good starting place. It's also another opportunity to market what the library or organisation is doing, by creating fan pages or a group, posting content, updates and interacting with users. Edinburgh City Libraries fan page at http://bit.ly/bWclhS is vibrant, interesting, continually updated and pulls in content from their other resources, such as their Flickr site.

Multimedia

YouTube is the second largest search engine in the world behind Google, in terms of the number of searches run per month. It's a great place to get practical 'how to' advice, but also a resource to use in order to publish your own. Library inductions, how to use library resources, introductions to staff, subject areas, all of these can be done quickly and easily now. With the ease of capturing video via the many devices now on the market, this is an obvious tool to use. Alternatively, creating podcasts or using other audio resources such as Voxopop at http://bit.ly/ccf5uj allows people to quickly and easily collaborate. These tools can produce content which can then be embedded elsewhere, or added into other third party resources such as Animoto (http://www.animoto.com) or Slideshare (http://www.slideshare.net) to mix and mash data together in new and interesting ways.

Home or Start Pages

A home or start page is the page that comes up when you start your browser – your company home page perhaps, or Google's search page. There is a particular type of resource that allows you to create your own start page – almost a personal portal onto the Internet if you will. Netvibes (http://www.netvibes.com) is a nice example of this – add widgets that allow you to check email, run searches without leaving the site, check the news from major broadcasters or publishers, read RSS feeds and so on. Because all the data comes directly to you a start page saves a lot of time, and because you're using it via the website and not downloading anything you can read it wherever you are. Perhaps even more importantly, Netvibes allows you to produce pages that are public facing and which can be instantly updated, embedding content from many other resources. Dublin City Libraries Netvibes pages at http://www.netvibes.com/dublincitypubliclibraries#Home is a lovely example of the way in which data can be pulled together from multiple sources.

Summary

While webpages and websites are still absolutely essential, and can act as an 'anchor' for any organisation they are far less flexible and consequently less important in comparison to many of the other tools that are available. Similarly, when looking for information it's important to increasingly remember to check many more sites for content; just using Google isn't really an option any longer (was it ever?) and searchers need to cast their nets much wider. Which makes for a much more interesting time!