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UKeIG

X-it - Bluesky thinking

Like the scramble for lifeboats on the tilting Titanic, we're all aware of the haemorrhaging of X users escaping an increasingly toxic environment in search of alternative networking and engagement opportunities.

THE UK e-information Group (UKeIG) celebrated the closing day of a dismal January by hosting Ned Potter (Faculty Engagement Manager: Community & UX at the University of York – www.ned-potter.com, @nedpotter.bsky.social) at our inaugural two-hour course on the ascending social media platform, Bluesky.

The interest was so overwhelming that we already have a repeat on 21 March. The delegate demographic embraced multiple sectors from across the library and information community, including public libraries, education, arts, humanities, government and the NHS; proof positive of the growing momentum to disassociate from X. Some delegates were contemplating migrating, others had done so already, but everybody was keen to learn more about Bluesky functionality, with advice and tips galore in an inspiring interactive session.

Why wave adieu?

In the current climate there is an argument that holding on to X is reputationally damaging. Our profession is renowned and respected for adhering to common values and ethics. Over time an active X profile may imply complicity with the increasingly right-wing and polarising platform. So much of the functionality that made pre-Musk Twitter useful has been jettisoned. Abandoned Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) and analytics, for example, alongside a re-engineered algorithm that force feeds propaganda; amplifying disinformation, hate speech and conspiracy theories.

Reticent to leave X having spent years building a following?

Even if you are still on the fence, establish a Bluesky profile to ensure nobody else lays claim to your corporate identity. There are obvious complications in making this decision. The wider organisation may not want to transition, so a strategic dialogue with communication, marketing and leadership teams will be necessary. A thought-provoking consideration arose during the course: knowing what you know about Musk and X now, would you sign up to use it today? A compelling argument to take to your organisation's top table.

How best to get out?

You'll need an X-it plan but explore your motives for switching. Align your decision to strategic objectives and the needs of your

target user groups. Give your users a one-month notice about the reasons for your X-it, highlighting all your alternative outlets for news, information and engagement. Use all those alternatives to share the news that you're migrating. Ensure that you disable X direct messaging, so users don't send enquiries down a black hole with no response. Perhaps secure the X account with two-factor authentication. Post a final X farewell message of explanation. There are many examples you can use. Check out Jisc's X-it goodbye, for example. The crucial advice is *not* to delete the account so that you can maintain ownership of your corporate X identity.

Bluesky benefits

Although it's a relatively young platform Bluesky is introducing enhancements on a regular basis, and there are hacks and apps to facilitate functions that it doesn't currently support. It shares much of X's usability so you will be instantly familiar with the general interface, alongside powerful supplementary benefits. Ease yourself in gently by exploring the new environment, identifying libraries, colleagues and service providers who have already established a Bluesky foothold. Follow them and harvest their followers. A significant Bluesky benefit is Starter Packs, which enable you to compile clusters of thematically linked accounts that others can follow en masse and use to generate ideas.

Concluding thoughts

The essential message is that quality trumps quantity (pardon the pun). Don't be put off migrating in fear of losing the critical mass of followers you've built up on X. Who knows how many of your current X followers have already left the building? Far more important to engage with a smaller group and rebuild a relevant and engaged network.

There was one huge elephant in the room for me. What next? Zuckerberg's Meta empire includes Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Threads. Many libraries, depending on their target audience, use these platforms to great effect. Peter Pomerantsev authored a fascinating article – 'Elon Musk and the new world order' – in *The Observer*. He warned of the dangers of a small technocratic, commercial elite "sucking your data and manipulating your every vulnerability". Zuckerberg recently announced kicking Facebook fact checkers out of bed in the US in the name of "free speech". How best do we respond if Meta continues to go down the same drain as X? Perhaps it's time, Pomerantsev argues, for the public spirited to claim back the rights to a decent, informed, constructive discussion?

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