Introduction

Why Use Web 2.0 Resources in Libraries?

Web 2.0, a term associated with the O'Reilly Media Web 2.0 conference held in 2004, refers to a perceived second generation of web-based services (such as social networking sites, wikis, communication tools, and folksonomies) that emphasize online collaboration and sharing among users. Library experts have used simpler and somewhat common terms to describe the Web 2.0 phenomenon: the read/write web where users are both consumers and producers of online content; an interactive two-way web; a place where everyday folks with internet access can create and edit stuff. Some have even ventured to draw the distinction between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 by describing the former as *a place to go and get*, and the latter as *a place to be and do.*

Embedded Web 2.0 technologies are commonplace in high user volume social networking sites such as YouTube, Delicious, Myspace, Facebook, Second Life, LibraryThing, Ning, Flickr, Twitter, Meebo, WorldCat.org, Wikipedia, and others. Stephen Abram[1] does a good job of identifying key technologies and social software tools that serve as the foundation of Web 2.0. These include:

- ➤ Blog publishing services
- ➤ Wikis
- ➤ RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds
- ➤ User-added reviews, ratings, and summaries
- ➤ Instant messaging
- ➤ Podcasts and vodcasts
- ➤ Folksonomies, tagging, and tag clouds
- ➤ Social bookmarking
- ➤ Social networking sites

➤   Streaming audio and video

➤   Community photo services or photo sharing

➤   Community book services (publishing)

The widespread popularity and almost obsessive need to participate and connect with one's family, friends, colleagues, and community on mobile and nonmobile devices (smartphones, MP3 players, laptops, tablets, PCs) and social- and community-oriented networking sites is evidenced in a recent Pew report. The Pew Internet and American Life Project, "Adults and Social Network Websites," shows that within a span of four years (2005–2009), the share of American adult internet users who have a profile on an online social network site has quadrupled from 8 percent to 35 percent, but this figure is still much lower than the 65 percent of online American teens who use social networks.[2]

Given this statistical data, it is not surprising that the potential benefits of Web 2.0 technologies, which allow us to easily create, contribute, communicate, and collaborate with each other in new and exciting ways, have not gone unnoticed within the library community. There has been widespread consensus that these cutting-edge tools should be immediately adopted, in a bid to retain core library users and cajole new users into the library. Five immediate benefits of using these Web 2.0 tools, which ultimately enhance the library's online presence and the library user's experiences, include:

1. *Delivery of highly customized, value-added services to tech-savvy clients.* Librarians can augment their roles as educators and community leaders by teaching constituents how to use and how to value using these social tools. Many library patrons are already proficient in using tools such as blogs, wikis, RSS feeds, and podcasts as an integral part of their daily regimen. Sites that embody Web 2.0 characteristics, like YouTube (video hosting and sharing), Flickr (photo and video sharing), Twitter (microblogging), LibraryThing (social cataloging), and Facebook (social networking), attract millions of users every day. Any attempt to serve up library services to these tech-savvy clients must be an aggressive customer-driven effort. Cybrarians should be proactive, learning more about these tools and pushing library services

and content to users where they need it the most—in effect, invading their social worlds.

2. *Overcoming economic turmoil by integrating Web 2.0-driven services into the library's economic recovery efforts.* As budget woes, staff layoffs, and cuts in services continue unabated at libraries and allied companies in the information industry, many administrators have been assigned the bitter task of stepping back, reflecting on, and reassessing existing services. Fortunately, during these tough economic times, forced frugality and stymied efforts to increase library budget allocations have ignited a spirit of innovation and creativity among library administrators and staff. In a united team effort, both groups have come together to reevaluate and reposition library policies, advance networking and collaboration efforts, and become more creative in using scarce resources. This show of unity and originality has prompted many observers to comment that the economic downturn should be described as both the best of times and worst of times for libraries. As will be shown by using live library examples, some libraries have been more adept and successful than others in harnessing and implementing Web 2.0–driven services at a lower cost with increased patronage.

3. *Building alliances with patrons and improving communications with staff.* Social networking tools can advance a library's external dialogue with its patrons and improve internal communication and knowledge sharing with staff. For example, a library wiki can be developed as an online knowledge base, a tool to maintain best practices as well as policy and procedures manuals.

4. *Instant implementation and democratization of the web.* Putting content on the web is no longer the exclusive right of experts with knowledge of HTML and web programming languages. With the social software available for creating blogs, wikis, podcasts, vodcasts, and social networking sites, anyone—even those of us with limited technological expertise—can add online content. All you need is access to a computer and an internet connection.

5. *Survival in a competitive landscape.* Cybrarians[3] are not only challenged to get ahead of the Web 2.0 wave, but cautioned that once there, it is imperative that they stay on board and continue to lead the way. This becomes more crucial with the arrival of a new iteration dubbed *Web 3.0* or the semantic web, as evidenced by increased chatter in the blogosphere about the web being on the cusp of another wave of change.[4] If there is hesitation or unwillingness to adapt to changes, other rival information services will do the job for us. Google, who by its own admission wants "to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful,"[5] is already at the forefront, creating unique web applications to make it simpler for people to share information and get things done together. Google Books is an example of one such application that provides access to the full text of books that have been digitized and stored in a digital database. The relative success and widespread usage of Google Books among web searchers has already initiated stormy debates about the future and seemingly relegated role of libraries as storehouses of mainly print information.

Libraries have always been at the forefront of, and benefited from, adopting innovative approaches to improve services. It would now seem inevitable that Web 2.0 technologies could be added to the list of innovations and that librarians could gain recognition as early adopters. In fact, as readers will discover, most of the resources given in-depth treatment in individual book chapters have already been successfully integrated into existing library services and offered through library portals.

As beneficial as free and inexpensive Web 2.0 options can be for libraries with scarce resources, some words of caution should be heeded before rushing headlong into early adoption. As is the norm when implementing any new product or service, a period of critical evaluation and review (of current needs and product effectiveness) and intense consultation (with staff, clients, and vendors) is required. When these perfunctory first steps have been taken, only then can the right decision be made.

This book is a good starting point toward product evaluation. As you read each chapter, please consider sending your comments and contributing new resources to the accompanying book website at sites.google.com/site/cybrarianweb.

Endnotes

1. Stephen Abram, "Social Libraries: The Librarian 2.0 phenomenon," *Library Resources & Technical Services*, 52 (2008): 20.

2. Amanda Lenhart, "Adults and Social Network Websites," Pew Internet and American Life Project, January 14, 2009, www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/Adults-and-Social-Network-Websites.aspx (accessed January 21, 2011).

3. *Cybrarian* is a shortened form of *cyberlibrarian*, coined from the terms *cyberspace* and *librarian* to refer to a librarian whose work routinely involves information retrieval and dissemination via the internet and the use of other online resources. "Cybrarian," Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science, www.abc-clio.com/ODLIS/odlis_c.aspx (accessed August 10, 2011).

4. *Semantic web* is a term coined by World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) director Tim Berners-Lee. It describes a group of methods and technologies to allow machines to understand the meaning—or *semantics*—of information on the World Wide Web. "Semantic Web," Wikipedia, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semantic_Web (accessed January 21, 2011).

5. "Google Company Overview," Google, www.google.com/corporate (accessed January 21, 2011).