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Library Technology Upgrade: Using Web 2.0 Applications

by David Lehmann

When it comes to upgrading our technology, I am an advocate for adopting more technology advances into law libraries. While I am not pathological about constant upgrading, I think that timely, perceptive upgrades can make our work environment more enjoyable. Now is the time to integrate Web 2.0 technology into your library.

Jumping In

Even though Web 2.0 technologies have been around since 2004, many librarians have not adopted the innovations of this technology. Only early adopters jumped immediately into Web 2.0 applications. Now, to avoid being left behind, the remaining members of the legal library community are slowly starting to look at which parts of these technologies they can integrate into their day-to-day library operations.

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technology into your library.***

Over the last three years, as more Web 2.0 applications have been adopted in libraries, they have proven to be a stable technology for communication and collaboration in academic and law firm libraries. This technology will be around for the next several years even though Web 3.0 Semantic Web and its adaptive technology loom on the horizon.

Definitions

While we have all heard or read about many Web 2.0 services, do we really know what Web 2.0 is? Web 2.0 is the second generation of Internet-based web applications using Ajax, or AJAX, technology. Wikipedia defines Ajax (AJAX) as "an acronym standing for *Asynchronous JavaScript and XML* . . . a web development technique used for creating interactive web applications . . . intended to increase the web page's interactivity, speed, functionality, and usability." Essentially, what this definition means is that Web 2.0 tools emphasize online collaboration and interactive web services for multiple users regardless of the entry point.

Many Web 2.0 tools have very little function for law libraries. However, wikis, podcasts, RSS feeds,

screencasts, online word processors, and online hard drives do function well in a library environment and can help librarians improve vital internal law library functions. Since law librarians are striving to improve internal communications, make information dissemination more efficient, and allow for increased collaborative document processing, Web 2.0 applications are excellent upgrades to answer these concerns.

Innovation and change are essential to keep our library environments current, interesting, and adaptable to a new generation of millennial users, both employees and patrons. Blawgs, wikis, podcasts, screencasts, and online word processors are all Web 2.0 constructs that serve this purpose. All of these applications should be adopted in library use. I will discuss three applications to illustrate the benefits of these vehicles in improving library activities.

Podcasts

Podcasting is becoming one of the major vehicles for transferring information in the library setting. Duke University uses this technology for multiple purposes: speeches, lectures, news, music, and other information broadcasts. (See www.duke.edu/ddi/itunes/.) The University of South Carolina Library is using audio podcasting of a tour of the library, which can be downloaded or listened to on MP3 to understand the library resources available. Podcasting has also been adapted for legal research classes and as a supplemental source of students' research materials at several law schools. Christine L. Sellers points out numerous uses by many librarians who have adopted podcasting in her article in the May 2007 issue of the *AALL Spectrum*, "Are You Podcasting? Current Uses of Podcasts in Law Libraries."

Wikis for Project Collaboration

Wikis are mentioned a lot in the library literature, but they have not been adopted even though they are multifunctional technologies that are very easy to use and adapt to different purposes. Blogs and wikis are similar in how they communicate but have different underlying technologies. Wikis can be more collaborative than blogs and serve other functions in addition

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to communications. Besides keeping your users, faculty, and staff informed about events in the library, wikis offer information sharing and a chance for discourse about issues important to your library community.

What are wikis? "A wiki is web software designed for collaboration. Unlike a traditional website where pages can only be read, in a wiki everyone can edit, update and append pages with new information and without knowing HTML." www.jot.com/tours/hosted-wiki/1-wiki-definition.php

Wikis for libraries are the essence of collaboration and communication. They allow you to make information available to a large group of people and allow them to comment on the information, or you can restrict entry and the ability to review and comment to a small group, such as library faculty and staff only. Wikis allow you to publish notices and make commentaries on your library or other shared material and to link additional factual or literary materials that relate to conferences. The material can be

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accessed at any time and the information is always available. Wikis are a very useful tool for libraries to start using. For more information, see *The Tao of Law Librarianship: Becoming a Wiki Warrior* by Connie Crosby, www.llrx.com/columns/tao10.htm (January 15, 2007) and www.llrx.com generally.

Web 2.0 Online Word Processors

Finally, a note about one other set of Web 2.0 applications that every librarian should consider. Online word processors, like wikis, are a Web 2.0 technology. These are growing in popularity and being used as internal library storage and editing facilities. Many of these sites are available, but the highest rated of these sites are Google's entry called Docs and Spreadsheets, <http://docs.google.com>, Zoho Writer, www.zohowriter.com, and Writeboard, www.writeboard.com.

These sites are all different, but they all allow collaborative editing of a posted document with varying levels of access. Use of the site can be restricted by password from no access or read-only access, to allowing anyone with the password to edit it and track the changes. Users can post comments about their own and other changes in the document.

Documents from this writer can be exported to a blog or to any other document or downloaded into another Word document.

More . . . But Another Time

This is just a quick overview of some currently available technology. Screencasts, RSS feeds, and many other Web 2.0 applications are equally useful in library operations to students and patrons.

Conclusion

Why should libraries adopt Web 2.0 tools? Web 2.0 tools are another way to help foster library teamwork and sharing of information. Online collaboration through wikis and online word processors allow librarians access to each other's ideas and work, to

Find out which Web 2.0 applications will fit into your organization.

post documents, edit documents, and make trackable changes, regardless of the time or place. They allow complete editing collaboration and restricted access to a small group of internal staff. Podcasts and screencasts open up the library to a new group of technology-oriented users. They must be utilized to keep ourselves in communication with a changing technological world.

Find out which Web 2.0 applications will fit into your organization. These technology upgrades are not very expensive, and some are free. They can make all the difference in helping your library be more creative and efficient.

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