Chapter 4
How Librarians Are Using the Internet

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the variety of ways librarians are using the Internet from its influence on the provision of new services to how librarians use the Internet to communicate with each other. A brief overview of Google and Google Scholar and their impact on library services alongside the Library 2.0 service ethic is explored with specific attention to its development and how it connects to previous understandings of library service provision. This is followed by an examination of how Web 2.0 technologies are used by librarians to offer services. There appears to be a disconnect between the rhetoric of technology use in libraries and the actual use of these technologies by librarians in their work lives. This disconnect highlights the previously identified relationship librarians have with technology—a combination of excitement and caution. Following this, a closer examination of three specific Internet technologies, blogs, Twitter, and MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), is done. How librarians use these two technologies provides insight into the central place that technology has in the lives of modern librarians.

INTRODUCTION

The previous two chapters examined individual cases of technological advances and the impact they had on not only the practice of librarianship but what these changes to practice told us about the evolving professional identity of librarians. Chapter three ended with an examination of early online technologies that were beginning to affect library services. As has been demonstrated in chapters two and three, librarians have accepted the technological challenges that have come their way with a mixture of enthusiasm and caution. However, there is one technological change that has challenged and excited librarians like no other—the Internet. This chapter will explore how librarians have approached the next step in automation—the Internet—with special attention to Google, Web 2.0
applications and how librarians have used them in their work and to communicate with each other.

Due to the rapidly evolving nature of Internet technologies, this chapter will not be able to provide a complete picture of all librarian-related activities on the web. That is why only selected cases of online technologies will be explored, starting with Google and Google Scholar, followed by Library 2.0 and specific 2.0 technologies, such as blogs and Twitter. These cases were chosen because they highlight certain aspects of the relationship librarians have with technology. Google, for example, appeared to offer, at least to some librarians, a threat or, at the very least, serious competition to libraries. It offers an easy-to-use search interface that provides almost instantaneous access to information. This apparent challenge to traditional library services offered librarians not only serious competition in the realm of information provision, but also forced librarians to reconsider what the core purpose of the profession was. One response to the threat of Google was a concept called Library 2.0 that sought to redefine what it meant to be a librarian in the Internet Age. This chapter will explore Library 2.0 in its history, and some of the implications it raises for practising librarians. Although not the only response to the impact of Google and the World Wide Web, Library 2.0 had a wide-ranging impact on the profession and provides an excellent case study for examining how librarians reacted to such sweeping changes to the profession. Two specific examples of 2.0 technology, blogs and Twitter, provide ways to examine specific examples of how a Library 2.0 perspective was employed by librarians. Blogs were chosen because of the large impact blogging has had on the librarian community. Not that long ago, there were regular columns in professional journals, assignments in LIS programs, and comments on listservs encouraging, and sometimes even admonishing, librarians to not only read blogs but to create their own. Twitter, in some ways, has taken over the role of blogs, or at least it is providing an additional space for librarians to communicate in a “micro” way, meaning that small snippets of information (140 characters or less in the case of Twitter) can be exchanged with the express purpose of sharing knowledge with other professionals. There are, of course, other 2.0 applications that could have been explored in the chapter—Second Life and Facebook immediately spring to mind—but, as shall be discussed later, blogs, and maybe now Twitter, have provided librarians with a space to not only learn about new technologies and ideas affecting their day-to-day work, but also have a space to communicate with each other to actively, and collectively, form a modern-day professional identity.

**THE INTERNET, GOOGLE, AND IDENTITY**

As discussed in chapter one, the Internet has been around in various forms since the late 1960s, but it only had a significant cultural impact after the development of the World Wide Web in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As discussed in chapter three, early online developments were both embraced and cautioned against by librarians, but, for the most part, librarians wanted to evolve and expand library services to meet the demands of new technologies. This desire to grow and expand library services continues with the development of the web. For instance, there were library users groups developed to discuss how best to use micro-computing technology in libraries (Brandt, 1987), articles examining the “adventures” librarians were having on the web (Powell, 1994), articles on developing library homepages to ensure the library had a virtual presence on the Internet besides the catalogue (Falcigno and Green, 1995), and many articles on the variety of information sources available on the web—both free and proprietary (e.g., Bates, 1995; Lewis, 1995; Notess, 1995). Search engines have been around almost since the start of the World Wide Web and librarians have
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