

Introduction

While the purpose of this report is to give library managers the tools they need to encourage collaborative work both within and outside of their organizations, the report is also intended to make the case that social networking tools, when used efficiently by a library, are more of a boon to productivity than a drain on it. My hope is that by the time readers reach the end of the report, they will get not only tools that will help them in their library jobs, but also a sense of how social networking can be used creatively to expand or enhance library services. Most of this report will focus on the tools themselves and real-world examples of how they've been used, thus encouraging readers to experiment with these tools on their own.

Some information technology managers and administrators are blocking access to social networks like Facebook or MySpace or to social tools like blogs because of fears that their staff will spend too much time updating their profiles and commenting and not enough time working. In an article for the IT Pro website, Nicole Kobie reported on a survey that shows that 43 percent of employees have Facebook blocked at their organization. Her article, "Firms Blocking Facebook," gives details from the survey, conducted by the security firm Sophos, about how employers are limiting the use of social sites.¹

The value of these tools to the organization, however, is that any time lost to "frivolous" pursuits can be balanced out by getting real work done rapidly using the very tools that make administrators so suspicious. Blogs are excellent communication tools in and of themselves, and part of this report will explain how they are being used to support work, from training to bug tracking, in libraries today. Social networks are useful not just

because they provide tools that make collaboration easy (and cheap), but also because they are conducive to professional and personal networking at a much lower cost than the travel and accommodation expenses for a conference in a remote location.

There are, of course, expensive proprietary collaboration tools that can keep your staff inside a walled garden and reduce the amount of distraction that can come from using a social network, blog, livestreaming application, or other Web 2.0 tool. However, many users feel that these tools also wall off the ability of library staff to work with other librarians in other organizations. With proprietary tools, all collaborators must agree in advance on a platform in order to work together. With Web 2.0 tools, the barrier to entry for cross-organization (or cross-state or cross-country) work becomes a matter of a few minutes as opposed to a few hundred (or thousand) dollars. The possibility that some staff members may spend a few minutes commenting on a photo or updating their Facebook status when they should be working seems somewhat trivial compared to the cost savings that come with the use of free software and websites for collaboration.

Evan Rosen's *Culture of Collaboration* discusses the issues of collaborative teams and organizations in great detail. One of the bits of advice he gives in his book is that the "tools that we use outside of work take hold in organizations more readily than those we never use in our personal lives."² According to Rosen, the tools that we have already made use of in our lives require a shorter leap to become part of our routine at work. Many library staff members already have accounts at some of the social sites that I will be discussing in this report. Administrators should make use of the expertise that those staff members

bring with them from their personal lives to get a huge jump-start in the quest for training and wider adoption of the technology.

In this report, readers will also find hard data and concrete proposals that will save money and time in just about any collaborative effort library staff might decide to undertake. Even if a given library is not presently engaged in collaborative work, the activities that staff members do on a day-to-day basis can be improved by using collaborative platforms like Google Docs, a wiki, or an internal blog to facilitate communication.

Many of the services discussed in this report also have some sort of internal or private component. If administrators decide that Twitter would be a great way for staff members to keep each other updated on the progress of a project but don't want everyone in the world to view the messages, they could choose to either require all accounts used for that program be made private, or they could use an "enterprise" version of Twitter (such as Yammer) to keep all of the traffic within the library's private network. Most of the services mentioned in this report have the option of a downloadable and installable component that will allow a select group of users to use the service exclusively within the network.

Yammer
www.yammer.com

This report is not intended to be exhaustive, nor is it universal. Not all services will work for all libraries, and some of the tools described here may be more applicable in some situations than in others. The key point is that these tools have a large and growing list of applications that have been used effectively throughout the library world. The benefits of using Web 2.0 tools to collaborate are many and varied. If you work in a library, there is information here that can help your library run more efficiently.

Notes

1. Nicole Kobie, "Firms Blocking Facebook," Aug. 21, 2007, *IT Pro*, www.itpro.co.uk/123093/firms-blocking-facebook (accessed Feb. 26, 2009).
2. Evan Rosen, *The Culture of Collaboration* (San Francisco: Red Ape Publishing, 2007), 133.