

Collaboration in Action

Now that we have gone over many the different tools that are available for collaborative teams to use, we must ask how we can use these tools most effectively. This chapter includes a number of case studies involving many of the tools that have been introduced in this report. These are all cases where libraries used Web 2.0 tools to collaborate both internally with their own organizations and externally with other organizations to get library-related projects done. These stories are meant to illustrate how these tools are used in real-world situations and to inspire librarians to use them in future projects.

Collaborating Using Blogs

The state of Georgia uses a single library catalog for all of the academic libraries at the public colleges and universities in the state. The GIL OPAC committee manages this catalog. One of the committee members, Cliff Landis, helped to set up a blog that would collect and rank bugs and other issues in their recent investigation into adding a VuFind overlay to the existing catalog. The VuFind overlay adds Web 2.0 features to an existing catalog, so they decided that using Web 2.0 tools to help manage the project would be ideal. During an e-mail conversation with Cliff about the project (on January 9, 2009), he provided details on how the blog works to help facilitate statewide collaboration on this project.

VuFind
www.vufind.org

The blog was implemented in order to improve communications between the members of the GIL OPAC committee. It is run on a internally hosted WordPress blog and gives committee members a way to both request features and submit bugs that they find in the system. Cliff added the Vote It Up plugin for the WordPress system as well. This plugin adds a “vote” link to the end of each post, giving committee members a way to vote for a particular feature request or bug fix that they feel is important. This allowed the catalog developers that were working on implementing the VuFind system to easily identify the features and bugs that were most important to the committee members.

Vote It Up plugin
www.tevine.com/projects/voteitup

The combination of the WordPress blog and the Vote It Up plugin with blog comments on bugs and user requests gave developers and committee chairs the ability to make informed decisions about what direction to go with the pilot project. These tools made the communication part of the collaborative project easier and more transparent than traditional e-mail or telephone communication would have been.

Collaborating Using Wikis

Jason Griffey, the head of Library Information Technology at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, is respon-

sible for creating a wiki that is widely used both inside and outside of his organization. The wiki helps to support a new \$48 million academic library for his campus. In an e-mail to me, Jason described the wiki as giving everyone involved in the project—librarians, faculty, students, architects, and members of the state staff—a central point to find information and collaborate. He says that wiki has been “invaluable” to this effort.

Building Wiki for the University of Tennessee in Chattanooga

http://wiki.lib.utc.edu/index.php/Library_Building_Project

Jason Griffey’s wiki is edited by about thirty different people—some internal to the library and some external, but all part of the building project in some way. As many as five to seven people actively use the wiki at least once a week, but as many as fifteen use it on a monthly basis to enter updates. The wiki has provided the team of people involved in the project a single place for all information about the project itself. Jason said that they have found the revision history that is a central feature of wikis to be helpful in tracking changes to documents, especially on documents relating to library policy.

Jason began the wiki at the same time the building project became a reality—he felt the need to make information about the process they were about to undergo as transparent as possible. The easiest way to do that, he believes, is to “allow for lots of different content to be touched by lots of different people.” The decision to go with a wiki came from combining that need with the need for attribution and a record of the changes that were being made to the documents.

One important point that Jason made was that the wiki had been successful enough in its use in the building project for it to have grown organically. He says that all of the library’s departments are now using the wiki for document management. This shows that when given access to collaborative tools, people will expand the scope and use the tools as they need to—making the tools that much more valuable to the organization.

Collaborating Using Social Networks

Facebook is a popular service that started as a college-only application, then expanded to the public. It is still amazingly popular with college students, so Jay Bhatt, the information services librarian for engineering at Drexel

University, decided to use that platform to provide some collaborative opportunities for the students in the engineering department. He created the Drexel Engineering Information Resources Awareness page to provide a collaborative space for students and faculty to work together and to share information resources with one another. In an e-mail (on January 20, 2009), Jay said that he imports his blog feeds and Delicious links into Facebook for the students to use in order to discover new resources. The students make use of Facebook’s discussion board, as well as Wall posts, to disseminate information to each other.

There are several Facebook pages built around the College of Engineering at Drexel, and all of them provide a way for students to communicate, share information, and work on their college coursework together. In some ways, this is a collaborative study group with a global reach and a local focus. Drexel and Jay Bhatt are using Facebook to bring together students who have similar interests and are giving them a space in which to collaborate.

Drexel Engineering Information Resources Awareness Campaign

www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=4327909570

Collaborating for Training

Today, many Library Learning 2.0 and 2.1 programs have been offered around the world, but they all owe something to Helene Blowers, who introduced the original Library 2.0 program at the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County (PLCMC) in August 2006 and then expanded it to a Learning 2.1 program in May of 2007.¹ One of the programs inspired by the Library 2.1 program is Maryland Libraries Learning 2.1. When I asked Maurice Coleman about the program in an e-mail on February 5, 2009, he told me that he, as the technical trainer at the Hartford County Public Library, and Jennifer Ranck, who at the time was the training coordinator at the Eastern Shore Regional Library in Somerset County, Maryland, created Maryland’s Learning 2.1 program together. They took some of the sites from the PLCMC’s Learning 2.1 program and picked the ten that they wanted to focus on. They used the WordPress blogging platform to host the program’s blog and used the PBwiki service to host the extended descriptions of each of the things that they focused on during the program. The people who worked on the program could leave comments on the blog, though only Maurice and Jennifer could actually make edits to the page.

Maurice told me in an e-mail (on February 5, 2009) that the use of a single blog with comments from the participants (as opposed to each participant using his or her own blog to discuss the program, as was done in the Learning 2.0 course) made the Learning 2.1 program much less of a hassle and much easier for the students to participate in. The wiki gave Maurice and Jennifer a single place to store all of the supporting information for the program. They used the blog and the wiki to make their communications easier as well as to make the course simpler for the students.

Putting It All Together

This report has examined collaborative Web tools that many librarians are already aware of and using every day. We've seen how these tools can easily be put to use in collaborative library projects. Making use of the tools that have been profiled in this report will not guarantee that a big project will be perfect in every way, but the tools and ideas that are included in this report should give librarians a roadmap to making those projects better and less of a hassle.

From Facebook to Flickr to Google Docs, the use of these tools in library projects can improve communication, provide automatic backups in the cloud of data and important documents, and widen the pool of potential collaborators. When considering new tools, it is always important to keep security in mind. Some of these tools can put sensitive data at risk of hackers and, without regular backups, could cause a complete loss of data for a project. For those willing to enforce policy decisions for these tools (for instance, a policy that all documents must be downloaded to a local machine every day for backup or a policy about what sort of data gets added to these services and what sort doesn't) and are comfortable with the terms of service for the applications they choose to use, these tools can be of real benefit to a library's collaborative projects.

Note

1. Explore . . . Discover . . . Play—Learning 2.1 at PLCMC, <http://explorediscoverplay.blogspot.com>; Helene Blowers, "Learning 2.0 Message," Learning 2.0, Jan. 12, 2007, <http://plcmclearning.blogspot.com> (accessed March 17, 2009).

Learning 2.0 and 2.1: A Great Way to Teach Staff about Web 2.0 Tools

For those who have not already heard about the Learning 2.0 and 2.1 programs designed by Helene Blowers of the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County (PLCMC), these programs are designed to teach Web 2.0 tools and skills to library staff in a series of self-paced lessons. The lessons are structured so that each one is a blog post that staff members can read on their own. Students can then create their own blogs to respond to the questions and discussion points given in each lesson. PLCMC originally started with "23 things" to learn, but some who have also implemented this idea have expanded on those things and some have cut them down to suit their staff's needs. The Learning 2.0 program used many different Web 2.0 tools, many of which are included in this report, and provided library staff with a way to learn about Web 2.0 tools by doing, not just by reading about them.

From Helene's original idea came a number of different implementations. Helene keeps a list in the Delicious bookmarking service of all of the Learning 2.0 programs that she is aware of. Anyone can view how others have taken Helene's original idea and made it their own by visiting the list that she maintains at <http://delicious.com/hblowers/learning2.0Libraries>. She released her original program to the public under a Creative Commons license, as did most of the people who created programs based on her original idea. Anyone with a valid idea is welcome to contribute. This is a great way to get staff members who are not familiar with these tools trained and up-to-date.



Figure 14
Collaborating with FriendFeed