

A Cloud Computing Case Study

Library Society of the World

As an example of a modern and collaborative venture, the LSW (Library Society of the World) is almost perfect (see figure 3). It's a "dis-organization" (as opposed to an organization, of course) that was born from a discussion on Twitter and has developed by using just about every Web 2.0 tool available in order to communicate and collaborate. I sent the "dis-organizer" of the group—the person who actually set up the accounts in the 2.0 tools—some questions (via e-mail on September 2, 2008) about the LSW. Joshua M. Neff, a Web content developer for the Johnson County Library in Kansas, created the logo and the wiki for the LSW. He is probably the closest thing to a leader that this loosely organized group has.

Johnson County Library website
www.jocolibrary.org

Library Society of the World website
<http://thelsw.org>

I asked him to describe just what the LSW does and how it is organized. His response was

The Library Society of the World is an anarchic "dis-organization" (in the sense that there are no leaders, elected or otherwise) of library professionals and library fans. Its members provide professional and personal support to each other (and to any nonmembers in need of

and willing to receive professional and/or personal support). It also functions as an adhocacy, in that when things need to be done, the people most qualified and interested voluntarily coordinate with each other to get it done.

The LSW is, in every sense, a collaborative organization. The LSW started in the spring of 2007. A group of librarians were discussing their likes and dislikes—what frustrated and discouraged them—about the American Library Association (ALA). One of Josh's chief complaints about the ALA was the cost of membership, since his organization was unable to cover that expense. Someone suggested that they could start their own library association without requiring membership dues by using free social Web tools. Josh then told me that he believed a dare ("maybe even quickly escalating to a triple-dog dare") was issued, and he took the challenge. He came up with the name, a logo, and a free wiki on the PBwiki service to host the LSW materials, then posted a link to the wiki on Twitter and gave the password to whomever asked for it. The wiki was open to anyone willing to contribute, which is exactly what people did. Josh explained that some of the content was serious, most of it was humorous, but all of it was full of "enthusiasm and heartfelt sentiment."

So, the LSW started off as a conversation on Twitter and a simple, free wiki site, but it has now expanded to much more than that. According to Josh, about a month or so after the wiki was set up, Meebo announced the launch of chat rooms. He created one for the LSW, as well as a Facebook fan page. Others have pitched in as well—Chadwick Seagraves created a LinkedIn group,

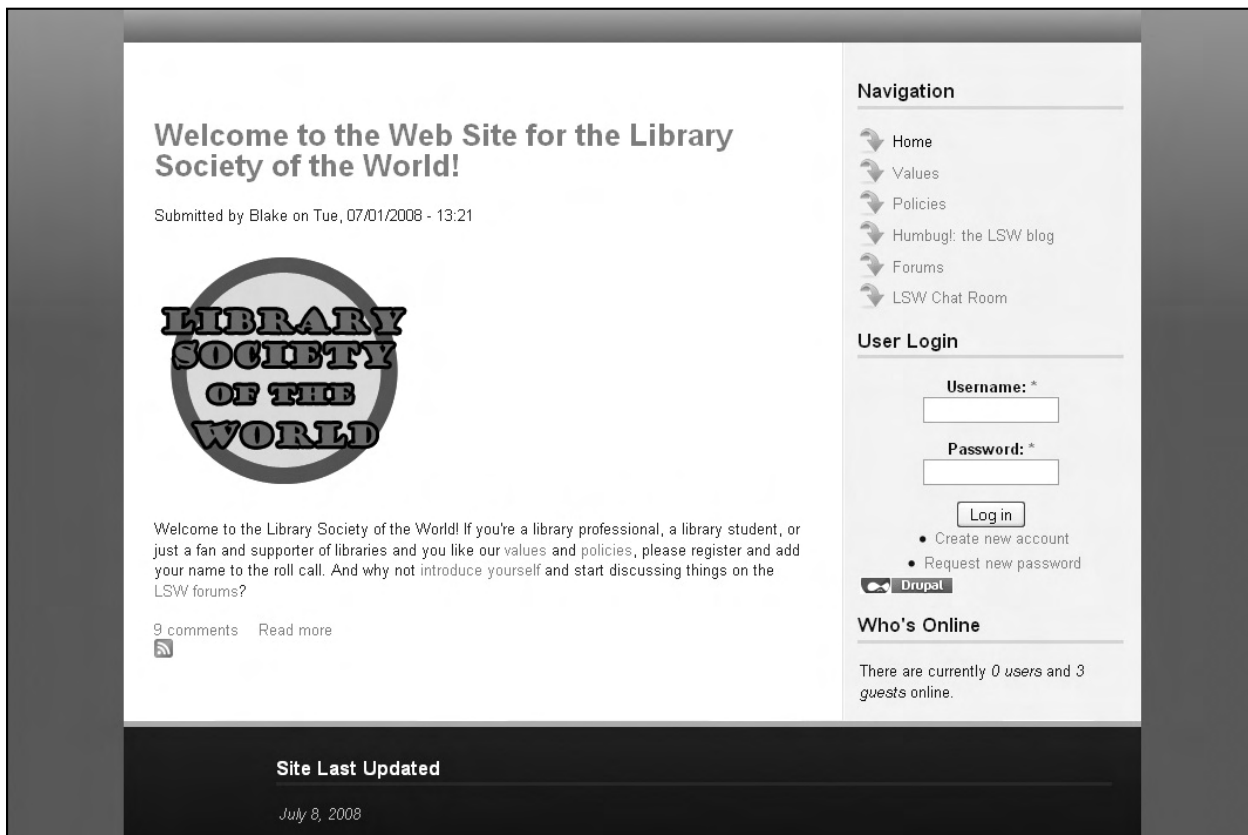


Figure 3
The webpage for the Library Society of the World.

Laura Harris started a LibraryThing group, and Courtney Stephens began a Last.fm group. Joshua has fairly recently started up an “official” website for the group that runs on the Drupal open source content management system and includes a blog and discussion forums. With all of these channels in use, Josh believes that the Meebo room still gets the most use. The discussion forums and blog on the website are getting some use, but the LSW-related conversations on Twitter and FriendFeed are still going strong and are thus far beating out the traffic on the website.

Meebo
www.meebo.com

Drupal
www.drupal.org

When Josh told me about the new LSW blog that was hosted at the LSW website, he explained that he saw it as a sort of library-themed Boing Boing. It’s still fairly new, but he’d like to see it “grow into a blog that’s updated several times a week (at least), promoting FOSS (Free, Open

Source Software) in libraries, library camps and unconferences, library smart mobs, populist technology and other ‘libpunk’ things.” In addition to the blog, however, LSW tools have also been used to collaborate on library-related projects. Josh explained that he, Steve Lawson, and Laura Harris presented on the LSW for Computers in Libraries 2008 and used the LSW wiki and other social Web tools to write out the proposal and plan the presentation. These three librarians had never met one another in person until they arrived at the conference. All planning and creating for the presentation was done via Web 2.0 tools that the LSW and its members were already using.

Boing Boing
www.boingboing.com

The LSW is still going strong, with plans for an online tech camp or unconference—perhaps something like the successful Five Weeks to a Social Library program that was introduced in 2007—in the works. If programs like this come out of the LSW and are successful, it will be because the members of that group used the wiki,

Facebook page, LinkedIn group, Meebo chat room, and blog/discussion boards on their website to collaborate on it and make it happen.

Five Weeks to a Social Library

www.sociallibraries.com/course

As a side note, “membership,” as it were, in the LSW is not incompatible with membership in the “official” ALA organization. I am a member of both organizations and met many people at the ALA conference in 2008 who were proud members of both (we even had ribbons to wear on our ALA conference badges showing our membership in the LSW). The LSW considers itself to be an a choice in addition to, not a replacement for, the official ALA organization.