

NET THE NET GENERATION!

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For the past few years we have heard quite a lot about web 2.0 and librarians, as a matter of fact, caught up with the new idea discovering the brave new world of library 2.0. However, there are different opinions whether these are existing and positive developments, or only a kind of new rhetoric with negative implications. Michael Stephens and Maria Collins wrote: *"Simply, Web 2.0 is the next incarnation of the World Wide Web, where digital tools allow users to create, change, and publish dynamic content of all kinds"*¹

As for me, I think development is always a positive thing, and the question is rather what web 2.0 really means for us. My co-author, who represents an older generation, approaches the question with more scepticism. We hope that a mixture of our approaches will lead to a progressive, still realistic conception of library 2.0.

But what do users think? How can the librarian create an equilibrium of new technology and usefulness? We are constantly faced with such questions.

The majority of the users of the Veterinary Science Library consists of students, who grew up in front of computers, and spent their adolescence using the internet. Almost all of them are registered users, and about one fifth are daily visitors of the library.

To begin with, we have to specify some features of using an academic library vs. taking advantages of public library services, which also make a difference in library 2.0 solutions.

1. The use of an academic library is not voluntary or optional. In our case: there is no other veterinary library, and much of the study material is available from our collection only. Thus the relationship is functional, centred around study and research.
2. The library therefore has a much greater responsibility for providing users with reliable data. There might be a contradiction between participation (e.g. in indexing) and reliability.
3. Unfortunately, the majority of Hungarian students and quite a number of foreign students lack basic skills in information and library use. Even the catalogue is a

¹ Michael Stephens, Maria Collins: Web 2.0, Library 2.0, and the Hyperlinked Library. In: *Serials Review* Volume 33, Issue 4, December 2007, Pages 253-256.
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/00987913> (Available online 26 October 2007)

novelty for them, while they are using the computer for a variety of study tasks and the internet in the most natural way for sharing their private or community life on YouTube, Facebook, iwiw or blogs.

It follows, that they expect our library to provide "traditional" services like in-house reading or borrowing of books, having a nap in the comfortable armchairs, and think that the computer lab is only meant to satisfy their daily need for internet surfing and emailing. If by chance or rather by the librarians' guidance they come across the magnitude of modern services (bibliographic databases, electronic journals, interactive tutorials, IM reference, etc.) offered, they are astonished and say: *Wow, can the library be so cool?* If they are asked, what services they would like, they ask for ones which already exist.

The big question is: *How to capture the interest of the net generation, how to turn it towards the library, and increase their awareness of information services? How could we make the library/information services a part of the "virtual space" students (and vets) are living in?*

Library 2.0 – present or future

At the previous EAHIL conference and other forums a large number of presentations dealt with library 2.0 and new technologies. When I first heard of them, I became very enthusiastic, and felt we need all the new possibilities and services. We must have a wiki, a blog, IM reference, and all the others as well. But my library is a small one with 500 Hungarian and 600 foreign students. I.e. we have a small user group, and a staff of 12 altogether. We do not have a full time "internet librarian", though all of us have tasks related to the web. As a matter of fact, these circumstances limit our possibilities. We have to offer the most comprehensive services to students, faculty and veterinarians.

The natural initial and focal point of library 2.0 services is **the library homepage**, which is for the time being, a static homepage with some modern services. What are these?

- *Private OPAC.* In the majority of libraries this is an old service. However, we had an opportunity to start the "my opac" function of our catalogue making extension of loan period, reservation, etc. possible only recently. This has brought about significant changes in the student's awareness of our catalogue, and the use of the OPAC. (We had 20,000 opac visits and 2,500 searching in the first three months of 2008.) We

found that practically no time was needed for making such a useful function popular, and that it immediately led to the increase of catalogue searches as well.

- *IM reference*. The next service I would like to talk about is IM (instant message) reference. We started with a Meebo chat window, but it was not very popular, maybe due to the limited hours of its availability. Today, users may contact the librarians via MSN and Skype. The problem is that there is only a limited access to these channels over the working hours when most of the users attend lectures or work. For the younger generation communicating on MSN or Skype is a part of everyday life, still there is little interest in this type of service. They find it a bit strange, since it is mainly the channel for friendly communication, not for information gathering or learning. Those, who use it (secondary school students, people from abroad as well!) actually ask questions that could be answered on the basis of the catalogue or the homepage, still it seems they prefer personal inquiry to searching.
- *Del.icio.us* – Beside the link collections on the homepage (ProFile), bookmarks of a topic are also offered on del.icio.us. It has to be “introduced” both to librarians and to students.
- *A Forum* – has been operational for some time. However, there was no meaningful discussion on it, and finally it became the victim of a hacker. Students and veterinarians have their own mailing lists, and it might be a better option to participate in these, or have a contact person who would mediate between these more lively communities and the library (expressing needs, forwarding information, etc.).
- *A Newsletter* – which appears four times a year in print (as part of the veterinary chamber’s journal) and online. However, sending it directly to e-mails should be tried. This is something, students rarely see.
- Our *open webpage* for veterinarians to put professional materials on used to work for a period, and then Hungarovet, a large web 2.0 portal was started, and provided veterinarians with a much better opportunity for virtual discussion with several hundred colleagues. We consider this as a normal tendency.
- *Iwiw* – the library has a profile on the most popular Hungarian community website. We are happy to see that students, veterinarians and laymen all like to be “friends” of the library. We have one or two new acquaintances every day. We should consider using this site for marketing purposes.

What we have not tried yet are blogging, RSS and podcast. After our initial enthusiasm, we had to realise that there are possibilities which may be successful only if there are enough pieces of new information, and enough people interested in them. Many of the library blogs started in the past few years have either “passed away” or give only limited information e.g. on new books. However, there are other library blogs which are more user centred. You can in the meantime feel the hard work behind them which is aimed at maintaining the interest of users. For the time being, we cannot afford such a labour input, thus blogging is not included in our plans.

Our system administrators also have security concerns in relation to interactive services like forums, “suggest a book” windows and the like.

The technological solutions are important, especially since they serve as attractions for the net generation, but not the most important. We consider the **change of attitudes** both on behalf of librarians, and among users more important.

Michael Casey and Laura Savastinuk wrote in 2006: “*The heart of Library 2.0 is user-centered change. It is a model for library service that encourages constant and purposeful change, inviting user participation in the creation of both the physical and the virtual services they want, supported by consistently evaluating services.*”² For our library, having gone through a process of quality assessment a few years ago, this sounds like web 2.0 combined with Total Quality Management in a proactive way.

What does this mean? If we want to capture the new generation (“Net the net generation”) we must be familiar with their needs both in terms of content and in terms of means of communication. We must provide functional services which are really indispensable for gathering information, and have to find the most convenient channels and means through which these needs can be satisfied.

We are just working on addressing this question – with the librarians’ consent – by organising a user community which helps us to develop the library in the right direction. I have read an exciting book by Eric S. Raymond entitled *The Cathedral and the Bazaar*. It dealt with software development, and presented two possible methods: the cathedral (applied e. g. by Microsoft) and the bazaar (e. g. Linux/Unix development). The book suggests in connection with open source software development that an enthusiastic community of volunteers (the “bazaar”), which is able for cooperation, may attain achievements which could

² Casey, Michael E., Savastinuk, Laura C.: Library 2.0. In: Library Journal, 9/1/2006, Vol. 131 Issue 14, p40-42. <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdf?vid=14&hid=104&sid=a05400a0-2d9f-4664-b904-ade5d195adf8%40sessionmgr103>

previously be expected only from well-paid teams. Sometimes this approach (reminding us of the Delphi method or the grassroots movements) may even be more effective. The budget of the library would not cover feasibility studies in the case of every new idea or service, and considering the relatively small user community (1100 students, 200 faculty and a couple of hundreds of vets) it would not be cost-effective either.

At this point I thought the library could have such a group of developers

- who contribute their ideas to the planning of new services as well as the physical environment of the library, and
- who would participate in the assessment of beta versions or plans.
- They will be informed about library developments regularly,
- could be asked about library services, and
- they will have the opportunity to contact the librarians any time to share their opinions.

For years we have had a cardboard box for ideas and criticism, but it was rarely used.

Occasional criticism was formulated when our courses were evaluated, but most of these went only as far as “there are not enough computers”.

How could we enhance the exchange of thoughts?

- We started recruiting our advisors by telling that we do not want to realize librarian’s dreams, we would like to develop in the direction marked by the needs of users.

Participants of the community are interviewed as a start, and we explicitly ask them to contribute to the development of the library. Thus they may feel how important they are for us, how significant their opinion is, and that they may be a part of the future of the library.

- They are approached as the “top users” whom we know to use the library a lot, and to be information literate at a high standard. (Of course, they may refuse cooperation.) They are not outsiders since they know the library well; still they represent the users with their special experiences in technology and knowledge organisation.
- All major user groups (such as Hungarian students, foreign students, faculty, and veterinarians) will be represented. Everybody we have interviewed so far was enthusiastic, and we hope they will be able to express the different needs clearly. We had the impression that the members of the DoIT (Development, Innovation and Tools) community, as we called them, were a bit amazed at the first moment, then

really open, willing to talk about their net practices in other fields of life and to share their ideas. They seem to use the internet mainly for information searching, e-mailing, and chatting. They suggested that more electronic materials (lecture notes, e-books) should be available from home. However, when asked about what they missed most they mentioned the cloakroom being inconvenient, the lack of local lights, and the lack of quiet a study area, more books, more computers, and a wish for a coffee (vending) machine.

We would like to establish continuous communication and interaction between the group members and librarians. We are going to inform them about the library's situation, achievements and plans, turning them into "top users". Hopefully with this knowledge and understanding in their minds they will be able to suggest us developments which best suit the target audience they represent.

Introduction into library use, information sources and database searching is a key area of library-user interaction. We had a professor in the 1960s who said: *those who do not spend at least two hours in the library every day, will not be able to pass their exams*. Library use was much simpler at that time: you had to read a limited amount textbooks and follow some journals. Now you must be familiar with a great number of search interfaces, electronic collections, softwares, plug-ins and passwords required for their operation.

Integrating user education – attraction and motivation

For undergraduates the main motivation for "library informatics", as our course is called, and the use of library resources is thesis writing which is compulsory for everyone. Unfortunately, the course (which is optional for the majority of undergraduates: Hungarian veterinary students!) is scheduled for the first and 5th semester respectively, when there are still years of study to come before selecting a topic for the thesis.

However, there are other tasks in the curriculum involving the **writing of essays**, reports, case studies, diaries in pathology, internal medicine, food hygiene, animal welfare, etc. which are considered as good opportunities for providing students with the basic skills of information gathering, and to enhance their use of the resources offered by the library at the time of need. The problem with these is twofold.

In most cases, use of technical literature is not a requirement. This year, we talked to all department heads or tutors whom we know make students write essays of some kind, and

found that most of them do not require reading. Some were of the opinion that the inclusions of a few references should be an explicit requirement in the outline students get. The only positive example was a department that has been requiring essays from students for about 10 years with extensive use of literature in the 4th semester.

The library offers a two-hour extracurricular introduction with background material on the internet for these students. Not many, but some take advantage of the programme which is “advertised” by the departments.

The library also compiled a five-minute promotional material presenting services very briefly which may be shown at the beginning of the lecture/practical in which the task is given. This year it was presented only once, and was accompanied in the classroom by discouraging metacommunication of the tutor showing indifference.

We think, no breakthrough can be achieved among students until the faculty members are convinced that the use of literature, and the acquisition of skills related to it are vital for the students, and that the acquisition of these skills is a step-by-step process, which requires practice. In this respect, netting the net generation should start by netting the older generation – to put it mildly.

The other problem is, that there is no time allocated for “library informatics”. This may be easily overcome by offering students the possibility of selecting the hours most convenient for them, and by providing e-courses.

The introduction of **e-learning** is more of a success. We introduced complete online courses using the moodle software two years ago. The study and practice material has been there, and there is a test and written feedback from the librarian at the end of each unit. More and more students (for whom library informatics is compulsory) are choosing this option, and as the evaluations show, they prefer it to classroom work. Actually this is an excellent solution for more advanced computer/internet users, and we believe a better and more effective way of acquiring information literacy skills than the contact practices.

We also plan to start a new optional course which would include an introduction to database searching, basics of scientific writing and – with cooperation of professors – reading, analysing and assessing peer reviewed articles. This might be a more attractive way of preparing for thesis writing under a name like “*reading seminar*”.

You can take for granted: we do not give up

- fighting for a compulsory course in library/information use for all undergraduates, and
- working on convincing lecturers of the importance of these skills.

Until then, we keep showing the possibilities the library has to offer for each and every student who comes to the library saying: *“Could you help me find material for my thesis? I looked at the internet, but could not find something really good.”*

Conclusions

We started with web 2.0 and library 2.0 focusing on new technology and what it has to offer for a 220-year old library. We have tried various solutions, and step-by-step realised that

- only really functional (needed) services have a chance for being used,
- we have to offer the means of interacting with the library to the net generation which they use within their own communities,
- we need a community of advanced computer/internet users (DoIT group) who would actively participate in finding the best channels to make existing library services known to all user groups, and develop new ones,
- there is much more we should do in the field of interpersonal relations.

Library 2.0, for us, means coming out from behind our reference desk, and engaging in interactions with all kinds of users. Librarians tend to behave like parents, who know what is best for their children, and are upset if the youngsters are not happy with the “toys” they offer. Like it or not, we have found out there are several services for which there is simply no need, we have also found there are some which are simply not known and need better marketing, and there are some which we have to create. Interaction with users must be regular both in person and in the virtual space for which we need a portal system, which is capable of integrating the present contents with library 2.0 services.