

LibraryCrunch

Bringing You A "Library 2.0" Perspective, by Michael Casey

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What Library 2.0 Is Not

I recently heard a sales pitch from a company trying to sell a mechanism that allows customers to store personal information on small, credit-card-sized cards. It works like this: the library buys a card-reader for every OPAC (at over \$90 per unit) and then sells the small cards to customers at the cost of \$10 per card. The customer is then able to save his bookmarks, passwords, form data, etc., onto the card.

Does this help the customer? Yes. Is it cost effective for the customer or the library? No.

There are two primary problems with this idea. First, the tools are proprietary in nature. Instead of simply using a USB drive to store the data (and thereby allowing the customer to take his data with him wherever he goes), the company utilizes a proprietary interface (ironically, this device plugs into a USB port) and a low-tech yet also proprietary card to store a small amount of data that cannot easily be made portable without the customer also buying an expensive card reader.

The second major issue -- and the one that upsets me most -- is the fact that web 2.0 applications already exist that serve these needs. Imagine the library teaming with (or simply promoting) Delicious and/or Backpack to serve customer storage needs? They could save their bookmarks, ideas, notes, to-do lists, etc., at no charge, and accessible anywhere without the need for any external hardware. Now imagine a savvy catalog provider writing an API to interface the library's catalog portal to one of these web 2.0 applications.

It certainly may make sense for the library to have a physical mechanism for allowing the customer to store and retrieve such information, but that technology already exists in the form of USB drives that have no need for any proprietary interface. Companies wanting to do business with public libraries should not be creating proprietary hardware. We need to require a certain efficiency in whatever we purchase. Library 2.0 is not a closed, immobile future.

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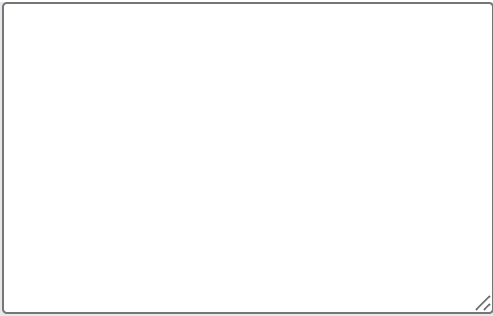
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