

LibraryCrunch

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

[« Whatever tools take us there are the ones we will use | Main | Santa at Starbucks »](#)

A Dialogue on L2: The services change, the mission does not

I received this from Laura Savastinuk today:

There has been a lot of discussion recently over [what is Library 2.0](#) and what everyone really thinks it means - and that is fantastic. But, I'm beginning to feel as though we're drowning ourselves in philosophy and forgetting the main point of all this - better library service. I'm reading where people are debating whether Library 2.0 should it be Library 3.0, Library 4.0, Library 5.0, etc. If the name is such an issue, why not call it Library X? And then there are people pondering over what a library really is? Is it a building or an organization or just an idea? And should we talk about 2.0 in terms of libraries or librarians? Not a bad discussion to have, but I'm worried we're going to lose ourselves by over-analyzing what is really a simple concept. I just don't want the main point of Library 2.0 to be lost because we're (all) being too detail-specific OR too philosophical, at this stage anyway. You did say that Library 2.0 (or whatever we call it) is best defined by individual libraries. If so, then we don't want to bog ourselves down in details that should ultimately be decided by whatever library incorporates this new method of service. What are your thoughts on that?

I agree. We're seeing many of the same questions being tossed at Library 2.0 (L2) as we do at [Web 2.0](#). This is to be expected. Many want to control the meaning, the definition of L2; all I want is to do is illuminate the goal. We're all going to see and view L2 [differently](#) because we're all moving at different speeds and we're at different points along the path to L2. Our view of L2 is relative to our own situation, but we can agree on certain [fundamental goals that Library 2.0 speaks to](#).

One thing you mention that goes through my mind a lot is, "what is a library?" I'm not sure we know anymore, and I fear one of the things we're going to see is increasingly diverse interpretations of what a library really is. There is no way to begin including some of the things that have been discussed as being L2 without thinking that libraries may soon begin deviating from each other's understanding of *library*.

This, to me, is where a clearly defined mission comes into play. The tools we use, the services we offer, the staffing models we follow...all of it can change (and needs to change in order to evolve and improve) so long all we do drives us towards serving our mission. The services change, the mission does not.

Posted by Michael on December 7, 2005 09:16 PM | [Permalink](#)

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» [Talis and Library 2.0](#) from LibraryCrunch

Talis is throwing together a round-table to discuss Library 2.0. I'm not sure what to think of this, though I hope that John Blyberg is invited to be a part of their discussion. Talis has taken a very proactive... [\[Read More\]](#)

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Thanks for your comments. On a related note, I want to mention the following:

On his blog, T. Scott writes, "What strikes me about much of the Library 2.0 discussion is how library-centric rather than user-centric it is."

http://tscott.typepad.com/tsp/2005/12/librarian_50.html

Wow. I really hope that is not the overall impression those discussing Library 2.0 are giving. Because, at least in our talks (Michael and I), we've discussed Library 2.0 as a way to empower the user. We want to make the library more user-centric by giving our customers the ability to tailor services to best meet their needs.

I hope that this isn't just some "trendy" concept. We're not talking about a name (Library 2.0, or whatever it is called). We're talking about a way to bring libraries closer to meeting their ultimate goal of successfully serving the user.

Posted by: Laura Savastinuk | [December 7, 2005 10:58 PM](#)

Interesting where he says:

>> Sometimes that means that we'll be doing things that everybody expects from libraries, but sometimes it means we'll be doing things that nobody ever associated with a library. And sometimes it means we'll stop doing "library" things, because they're not really the things that our people need the most. <<

It was always my belief that when libraries do things their customers want then they are doing "library" things. Those "things" may change (they must) but the "things" libraries do to satisfy our customer's needs are "library things" -- it's just that those things evolve and improve. Never do those things we do stop being library things.

Our job IS to build better libraries and library services.

Posted by: [Michael Casey](#) | [December 7, 2005 11:13 PM](#)

Admittedly, to some extent it's a rhetorical strategy. As a library director (and I'm an old guy -- I've been a director for 18 years at two different libraries), I feel that part of my job is to shock my crew into challenging their own thinking. So when I say, "our job is NOT to build a better library," I'm trying to say, quit fussing about our turf, about our position, about our relevance -- get out of yr comfort zone and focus on the fact that we have skills and talents and abilities that are desperately needed by our communities and that the library is just one of the tools that we now have at hand. And I'll say it again -- libraries don't DO anything. Librarians do.

I talked about these issues at the Charleston Conference a few weeks ago. A questioner from the audience wanted to know what I thought about the trend in some sectors to change what we call ourselves (information specialists or information managers or knowledge managers or whatever...). I feel very strongly about this. I am a librarian through and through and through, and the notion that we will change the way that people view us by changing our name seems very naive to me. In that sense, I agree with Michael completely that whatever we do is "library stuff."

I imagine a time when I step off an airplane, in my black suit, cowboy boots & black hat, with whatever electronic communicating device I'm using that week in one hand, and my guitar in the other, and passersby glance up and say, oh -- that must be a librarian.

And if in that future, we can make the word "library" resonate with those same passersby with all the potential that we're trying to actualize, then we're getting somewhere.

But I'm concentrating on developing better librarians -- if we do that, better libraries will happen naturally. If our gaze is focused on the library, I think we're turned in the wrong direction.

Posted by: [T. Scott](#) | [December 7, 2005 11:40 PM](#)

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