

LibraryCrunch

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

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Born in the Biblioblogsphere

What is Library 2.0? Does it matter that we have a finite definition? [Michael Stephens](#) over at Tame the Web has a new post that asks us if Library 2.0 is more than technology. Yes, I think it is. [Stephen M. Cohen](#) over on Library Stuff argues that library 2.0 is merely a continuation of the Baltimore County Public Library's "Give 'em What they Want" philosophy of service. Perhaps. But let's look at this quote:

See that your library is interesting to the people of the community, the people who own it, the people who maintain it. Deny your people nothing which the bookshop grants them. Make your library at least as attractive as the most attractive retail store in the community. Open your eyes to the cheapness of books at the present day, and to the unimportance, even to the small library, of the loss of an occasional volume; and open them also to the necessity of getting your constituency in actual contact with the books themselves.

This was written by John Cotton Dana and published in Library Journal's December 1896 edition. 1896. Was Dana espousing something similar to Library 2.0? Perhaps. Has our battle been going on this long? Absolutely. Will our battle continue for another hundred years? Yep.

I bring this up because I think there's a misperception that Library 2.0 is trying to be a zero-sum answer to an age-old problem. It is not. Library 2.0 is a service philosophy – a theory, if you will – that attempts to guide libraries in their effort to win new users while, at the same time, acknowledging that our current service offerings are insufficient and inflexible. Built into L2 is the realization that libraries are never really going to be able to reach this level of [Platonic ideal](#) that so many of us set as our goal. But also built into L2 is the understanding that we will never stop trying to reach that level of service, and that we will use every tool at our disposal in our attempt.

Library 2.0 sees the reality of our current user-base and says "not good enough, we can reach more people". It seeks to do this through a three-part approach -- reaching out to new users, inviting customer participation, and relying on constant change. Much of this is made possible thanks to new technologies, but the services will only be partially tech-based.

So yes, perhaps L2 is simply a continuation of the ideas of Dana and BCPL and so many other attempts at greater and greater community reach. But Library 2.0 is not the idea of any one individual. It was born in the biblioblogsphere in the writings of many diverse thinkers, and while one concise definition will never fit L2, there is a certain understanding that Library 2.0 represents, at a bare minimum, a discussion point around which many will offer ideas and discuss solutions.

We would not be in this place were it not for the technologies that allow us to have this conversation – the blogs and wikis and Web 2.0 tools that facilitate collaboration and discussion. These tools which allow us to talk about our problems will also play a great role in the solution – these same inclusive tools will be used to reach out to both our fellow librarians and to our users and harness their knowledge in crafting new and improved services. This newly-formed community will work together to address all of the issues surrounding libraries, and I will continue to argue that Library 2.0 is the best approach to use.

Posted by Michael on January 3, 2006 07:46 AM | [Permalink](#)

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I have some draft posts I have been working on re Library 2.0, L2 or whatever you prefer to call

it. I'm not really happy with any of them so far, and since I haven't really been motivated for what unknown reasons to write anything serious since semest... [\[Read More\]](#)

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The three points of Library 2.0 that you list are key. I'd like to see more discussion about them. I really like what you said about how, even though librarians have been talking some of these concepts and goals - including outreach, user feedback, and change - for years, with L2 are we finally have the ability to really make them happen.

Posted by: [Laura S](#) | [January 3, 2006 03:17 PM](#)

I remember Jenny's post of this picture: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/shifted/71809600/>

Does the most attractive retail store in your community let you bring in your drinks or talk on your cell phone while shopping?

If this idea has survived since 1896, then why are there sill libraries where we cant bring in our bottled water and cellphones and IM are banned?

Library 2.0 is a wake up call. You will change and you will evolve to meet the needs of your community or you will become obsolete (because they'll find another source to get what they want. That's what people do).

Posted by: [Chris Deweese](#) | [January 3, 2006 03:48 PM](#)

Yes, that photo has stayed in my memory also. You're right, too, in that we evolve -- we must. What is L2 today will certainly not be L2 in several years. This is exactly why I cringe when we try to define L2 too narrowly.

Posted by: [Michael Casey](#) | [January 3, 2006 04:01 PM](#)

"...we will never stop trying to reach that level of service, and that we will use every tool at our disposal in our attempt."

This is essentially what I had in mind with my post today challenging librarians to take on some of the Yahoo! Answers questions. I was frustrated that some of the health-related answers people were receiving, and decided to set up a moniker with "librarian" in it and take on some of the questions myself. In this manner, librarians can help people who aren't taking their questions to the library, by bringing librarian-quality answers to them. It's a fairly subtle form of outreach, and likely won't make much of a dent in terms of the # of questions, but I'd be interested in your thoughts. I suppose this is in part how I think of the Library 2.0 concept - taking librarian services outside the library and into non-traditional realms.

Posted by: [Rachel](#) | [January 3, 2006 05:30 PM](#)

The three points are excellent, Michael. Well done! I agree with Laura!

Posted by: [Michael Stephens](#) | [January 3, 2006 08:19 PM](#)

[Michael- I tried to submit this comment yesterday, but maybe it didn't get through. -Steve]

I had been mulling over many of these ideas today, thinking about posting a comment on the Library Stuff posting that you link to; namely, that L2 doesn't have to be brand new to be an interesting and useful concept. We don't need to think of L2 as a radical shift in thought about libraries that began in July of 2005 and will be completed by the end of the decade. It shouldn't surprise us to identify "L2 thinking" in librarians over a span of hundreds of years. Thanks for expressing that so well in this post.

At the same time, L2 does have to mean something besides "cool library stuff." I keep coming back to the way Tim O'Reilly used the idea of a "Pattern Language" to describe Web 2.0 applications in his article "What is Web 2.0." We could come up with some L2 patterns, some of which would be pretty specific in terms of current Web technologies, and others that might be more general, such as "rapid response to rapid change (in technology, user expectations, publishing, etc.)."

Thanks, also, for being part of the panel that Michael Stephens assembled to take on my question about non-tech applications of Library 2.0.

Posted by: [Steve Lawson](#) | [January 5, 2006 08:34 PM](#)

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