

LibraryCrunch

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

[« Decentralization and the Integrator](#) | [Main](#) | [The 2.0 Meme »](#)

The Answer, and Nothing But the Answer

Two weeks ago I spent three days in Seattle talking with various Microsoft employees and fellow technology and library bloggers about some of the search-related products Microsoft was working on. Some of the specifics I cannot discuss simply because I signed a non-disclosure agreement. But I came away with one especially relevant realization that, because of its generality, I can discuss.

Library customers do not always want librarian answers. Sometimes customers want soft data and not hard data. When someone fighting cancer comes into a library and asks for information on their illness, we need to be careful to offer both hard and soft answers. We need to point them towards the books and electronic materials that will answer their medical questions, but we also need to point them towards both the physical and electronic support networks (social networks) that are out there.

I am not pretending to speak for all librarians, by any stretch, but I know that we often place an inordinate value on providing the hard data when what customers also desire are answers to the softer side, the personal side, of their question. We need to know of, or know how to find, the online communities that have become so very popular over the past few years. In larger metropolitan areas there are certainly physical community resources we can direct customers towards. But in rural or less well served communities we need to be aware of the online support and social networks that exist so that our customers can have a place they feel comfortable discussing their needs with people with similar needs.

In many ways this is simply an extension of model reference behaviors – making sure our customers get the answer they want and need and not simply the answer we want to provide them. The difference here is that we need to know of these resources – to know that they even exist – and my fear is that far too many librarians are unaware of the online social networks that now exist.

We can extend this to other areas, as well. When a fellow librarian recently asked me if I had a copy of last fall's OCLC report I was able to quickly get them the PDF file of the entire document. But I realized that they may also need more than the report – they may need editorial analysis from other sources. What really made an impact with this librarian was the amount of substantive commentary and analysis that existed on the web, not in databases of newspaper and journal articles, but in blogs of fellow librarians and library professionals. The quality of the discourse on blogs is increasing, and the discussions regarding the OCLC report are an excellent example of the blog network being able to provide an excellent summary of the different views regarding the report's findings. But also of great value are the number of links to obscure but relevant articles that blogs often link to.

For many of you, there is nothing new here. But I want to encourage everyone to spend just a little time evangelizing about the sources of support and information that are online but not found in some of the more "traditional" online sources.

Posted by Michael on February 8, 2006 05:30 PM | [Permalink](#)

➔ TrackBack

TrackBack URL for this entry:
<http://www.librarycrunch.com/mt/mt-tb.cgi/108>

➔ Comments

Just last week I was talking to some fellow staff members about how we need to teach staff about how to add blogs and other new social software tools to their reference tool box. This article says so well, what I was stumbling over to communicate. Thanks

Posted by: [Helene](#) | [February 9, 2006 04:20 PM](#)

→ **Post a comment**

(If you haven't left a comment here before, you may need to be approved by the site owner before your comment will appear. Until then, it won't appear on the entry. Thanks for waiting.)

Name:

Email Address:

URL:

☐ Remember personal info?

Comments:

Preview

Post