

LibraryCrunch

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

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Evolutionary Technology and the Emerging Divide

At my library we're in the final stages of crafting our next technology plan, and we've been under a lot of pressure to find a showstopper, an eye-catching new technology to insert into it. But there's a problem. New technologies, brand-new, big-wow tech is emerging at a slower pace, and serious issues arise – issues that [Michael Stephens](#) refers to as [technolust](#) (see below) -- anytime you begin looking for a "big" technology.

We've spent a great deal of time over the past few years integrating many new technologies into our daily library operations – PC and print management hardware and software, a major ILS upgrade, staff and public wireless in the branches, RFID circulation and self-check equipment, mobile librarian tablet PCs, and PDAs for management staff. All of these introductions meant significant training of staff and, sometimes, customers. Some, like RFID, resulted in fundamental changes in daily operations.

We're also in the process of upgrading to VOIP, replacing our network servers, preparing for Horizon 8.1 (when [Stephen Abram](#), when?), opening two new branches, and, as always, keeping it all running. Our IT department is busy – very busy – and the fact that they've been able to integrate so many new technologies so successfully is remarkable.

We've also been slowly integrating blogs into many of our internal teams and committees, and IT has been trying to build a wiki to manage the huge amount of knowledge that flows through their department. We're even in the final stages of implementing an IM reference service. All of this takes lots of money – whether it's in the form of purchase costs or implementation/time costs.

So when my group, the Emerging Technologies Team, sat down to examine the current and future technology landscape, we quickly came to the realization that while there are some wonderful new things that can be put into our plan, few of them are actually new technologies. Most are modifications or improvements on existing technology. All of this leads me to believe that technology, at least right now, is in an evolutionary phase, whereas only two or three years ago we were still in a revolutionary time period where new ideas were rocking the library boat on a regular basis.

So what have we looked at to include in our plan? Much is building upon what we already have, such as pushing wireless to parks that sit next to our libraries; streaming video from our puppet shows and other programming events; and, integrating new touch-screen flat panel OPACs into customer-convenient places where more traditional computers cannot go.

Our Emerging Tech team is also making a strong effort to push for the introduction of certain Web 2.0 technologies into our service offerings, such as formally encouraging the use of browser-based office applications such as Writely and BaseCamp.

Where does this leave an Emerging Technology Team? Clearly we need to remove the expectation that technology will always offer sensational new tools that can be inserted into library operations and result in exceptional returns. While the pace of new technology may increase again in a few years, for now it appears that both hardware and software advances will be more evolutionary in nature. We need to educate those in positions of power that this does not mean that these evolutionary tools cannot result in revolutionary outcomes.

Programming being done by [Casey Bisson](#) and [John Blyerg](#) point to some of the revolutionary things that can be done with small, evolutionary, tools. What will result from these efforts will be amazing, and I am very anxious to see where we are in two or three years with their services. This illustrates the one item that we cannot put on our Emerging Tech suggestion list, a programmer. Clearly, one of the major divisions that now separates libraries is whether or not they can bring a programmer on board -- this will be what divides libraries in the next few years. The [Blybergs](#) and [Bissons](#) and [Vielmettis](#) of the library world are the newest must-haves, and perhaps **they** are the new revolutionary technology.

Technolust: "an irrational love for new technology combined with unrealistic expectations for the solutions it brings"

Posted by Michael on February 19, 2006 02:06 PM | [Permalink](#)

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Come one, come all. The Carnival of the Infosciences has returned to beautiful Urbana, Illinois for its 25th instantiation. Photo courtesy of Yee Wong. Seems the Carnival is in its midwinter doldrums. We got one submission this week and, Steve, I'm con... [\[Read More\]](#)

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I'm not going to say a word, as others are eloquent on this topic: This illustrates the one item that we cannot put on our Emerging Tech suggestion list, a programmer. Clearly, one of the major divisions that now separates libraries [\[Read More\]](#)

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» [Emerging Technology Watch](#) from Science Library Pad

An assortment of ideas about performing an Emerging Technology Watch (I categorize this as Technology Foresight). Does your organization have such a process / team? So when my group, the Emerging Technologies Team, sat down to examine the current and fu... [\[Read More\]](#)

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Just curious, does the video have to be streamed? I'd love to see a videocast feed for a library's programming. That'd be pretty slick.

Posted by: [Greg](#) | [February 19, 2006 08:09 PM](#)

Greg, I agree, a live videocast would be an excellent idea and would certainly be great for those who cannot attend but want to feel to be a part of the program.

Posted by: [Michael Casey](#) | [February 20, 2006 12:46 PM](#)

This post was a Ringleader's Selection for the Carnival of the Infosciences #25.

<http://tinyurl.com/h2paa>

Posted by: [Mark](#) | [February 20, 2006 01:20 PM](#)

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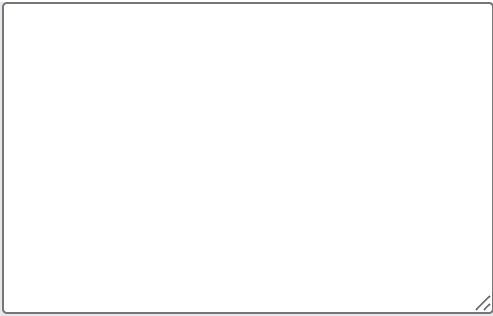
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