

LibraryCrunch

Bringing You A Library 2.0 Perspective, by Michael Casey

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Channel Surfing: I Want What I Want But I Only Want It My Way

Helene Blowers from [Library TechBytes](#) and [PLCMC](#) writes about [Information Literacy 2.0](#) and has a very interesting quote:

"It's as much today about the channels as it is about the information...it seems to me the notion of information literacy has moved beyond merely knowing, accessing and evaluating the usefulness of information. Today's it's also about having a comfort level with the preferred channels (& formats) that our users expect to be able to find and retrieve information in. These channels include among others, RSS feeds, Instant Messenger, SMS/Text Messaging, podcasts, videocasts, wikis, remixes, mashups etc.

There exists today such a huge number of channels that we need to be aware of. Some may argue that this quantity is far beyond the ability of the frontline librarian to manage. But I wonder about the way this information map really works. If these channels are viewed as paths or roads to a single destination -- "the answer" or "the resource" -- then the librarian can still play a vital role in assisting customers in finding the best road to reach that destination. But knowing the nest road is not enough, as not everyone likes taking the highway.

I still get the vast majority of my information from print and online reading -- literally crawling the print publications or websites I prefer and looking for interesting nuggets here and there. I know how primitive this is, but I've used Netvibes and FeedBurner and Bloglines and, in the end, RSS aggregators always end up leaving me feeling overwhelmed and under informed. I still make daily use of Netvibes, but if I look at my information flow I see that I use email and IM (and the social networks that go with those two tools) as my secondary information channels right after my print and online reading. RSS also falls into this second tier. Following in as my third tier information channels are Flickr, Wikipedia and numerous other wikis, text messaging, and the telephone (be it Skype or Vonage).

What I'm driving at here is that I, and everyone else, choose the channels that I am most comfortable with using. I think Helene is right on when she says *"it's ...about having a comfort level with the preferred channels"*. This does not mean I choose the *best* channel for any one particular type of information, or even that I choose the channel rationally. But the librarian -- behind the desk or online or wherever -- must deal with the reality of my channel choices and work within the boundaries I have drawn. If I want information on coping with a dependant parent, and I am uncomfortable with scholarly materials or simply feel more comfortable in a less formal information environment, then I may be shown several social networks, wikis, and podcasts that address my concerns. The librarian directs me in this manner because I am far more likely to see these more personal tools as dependable resources for my information needs. The librarian's role here is to direct me to credible social tools, online or local, while at the same time reminding me that there are other, more scholarly and perhaps more factual resources available should I desire.

[Social Searching](#), another Helene Blowers post, fits here in conjunction with Microsoft's recent announcement of Windows Live QnA. This social search service has the capability of being both a very broad search engine and a far more narrow, circle-of-trust style search engine that will allow users to choose those who they think are best situated to serve their information needs. In this case, the role of the librarian may extend to all of us, following the idea that in today's online environment ["Everybody has a librarian inside"](#).

I didn't intend to write this rambling piece but Helene's posts made me think. Yesterday's examination of knowledge management still has me thinking about ways to capture and preserve and, most importantly, disseminate the great amount of information we deal with daily. Plug in the need to be aware of several channels for reaching that information and our task increases substantially.

[library 2.0](#)

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