

LibraryCrunch

Service for the Next Generation Library: A Library 2.0 Perspective by Michael Casey

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We Know What Library 2.0 Is and Is Not

by Michael Casey and Laura Savastinuk

We know what Library 2.0 is and is not.

Before you can build a house you have to lay the foundation.

What does Library 2.0 mean to you and your organization? What is it that you want Library 2.0 to do for your users? If you don't know the answer to these questions, you must figure them out before you begin implementing new services and programs.

At Internet Librarian 2007 Liz Lawley said, "You have to figure out what the problem is first before you come up with a solution." She was referring to the use of Second Life as a method of social interaction with users; however her statement rings true for the general concept of Library 2.0.

Energy focused on implementing new tools and programs is wasted if we don't know what our users really want. Without knowing that, we create more work for ourselves with hit or miss initiatives.

In the past two years much of the discussion of Library 2.0 has been focused on little things we can do to better serve our users. We try to "get them where they are" by implementing IM reference and creating a presence on social networks such as Flickr, MySpace and Facebook. We attempt to lure them in with gaming nights and rock concerts. These can all be great tools to better serve our users. It is inspiring to see so many libraries creating new ways to reach their users.

However, we have to be careful to not flood ourselves with new projects until we have a clear understanding of what it is we're trying to do and where we want to go. And in the spirit of Library 2.0, that means first figuring out what our users want and need.

Maybe it is time we all take a step back and have a mini re-evaluation of Library 2.0, what it is, and how it can help us better serve our users.

Library 2.0 is user-centric. It is a shift in our focus from having libraries decide what is best for users to letting users decide what they want, how they want to get it, and how we can best serve them. Are we doing enough to find out what our users want? It is imperative that we do the research before we throw programs and initiatives at them. Otherwise, we're the one deciding what our users want and need – a concept that is decidedly *not* Library 2.0.

Library 2.0 is constant change and evaluation. Once we've decided to implement a new service or program, we must continually revisit and evaluate it. Are we asking our users not only if they like it, but also how it can be improved to better serve them? Are we involving staff at all levels in the creation and evaluation process?

Library 2.0 is *not* just about technology. No matter how much this is said, technology continues to be a leading topic of discussion. We should all be grateful for the doors to our users opened by new technologies. However, we must remember that while technology can be a tool to better serve our users, it is not the final answer to all of our problems.

Library 2.0 is political. Politics tends to be a dirty word, but we absolutely must consider it. Politics, within both our organizations and communities, plays an unavoidable and undeniably important role in our path to better serving our users. We have to get not only our staff and administration on board – we also have to get our library boards, community leaders, and users on board as well. And the best way to do that is to talk to them – let them know that we all share a common goal of providing access to all kinds of information.

We've heard from countless librarians who have encountered some form of resistance in their organization to Library 2.0. Why is that? As has been said from the beginning, the spirit and driving force of Library 2.0 is the *same* tenant that has been a fundamental part of library service for decades – providing our users with access to information. Library 2.0 strives to reach this goal in part through customer-driven services.

Politics will be a part of any organizational structure regardless of what changes come – it's the dark reality we all must deal with. We can't avoid it and some would argue that it is healthy. What we can do is strive to maintain focus within our organization and among community leaders on our common goal of providing better library service for our community.

If we focus too much on the details and specific programs before we can explain what it is our users want, then our communities, administrators, library boards, and staff may well rebel against Library 2.0 without ever truly understanding what it is about.

We hope that some conversation can be focused back on the fundamental concepts of Library 2.0, the efforts and resistance for change, and how to figure out what our users really want from us.

Posted by Michael on October 31, 2007 10:15 PM | [Permalink](#)

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Great post. I commented if you are interested. An excerpt:

However, the solutions proposed by Library 2.0 are mostly about technology. Casey and Savastinuk agree: "No matter how much this is said, technology continues to be a leading topic of discussion."

And why is that? Because technology gets visible results quickly and cheaply. People believe that the library is missing a certain segment of the population—or perhaps it is that a certain segment are missing the library? Regardless, librarians want to do something. So they start a blog (without questioning if the missing population reads blogs) or they have a wiki (without questioning if there is a demand for a wiki) or a Second Life presence (without questioning whether there are people looking for their library on SL).

<http://subjectobject.net/2007/10/31/empirical-research-and-library-20/>

Posted by: [Steven Chabot](#) | [October 31, 2007 11:34 PM](#)

I think the technology focus happens in part because the evangelists tend to be from the "techie" side of the coin. That makes it easy for people who hear "library 2.0" but do not understand it to file it under "SEP" (ie. somebody else's problem).

We need the annoyed librarian to start evangelizing for us instead. :)

Posted by: [Ryan](#) | [November 1, 2007 09:23 AM](#)

While I agree with you overall, you mention what users "want" more often than you mention what they "need." I think there are valid examples of things that librarians can guess our users would find very helpful but that they don't actually voice.

For example, WiFi used to be this way, before everyone started expecting it everywhere. I know of libraries that put in WiFi without any users specifically requesting it, but it turned out to be invaluable to them. I think RSS is another example of something patrons could find valuable but have no idea they "want."

At a dinner this week, I noted that I while L2 proponents can generally agree on philosophy, I think all of our personal definitions are a little different. That may hurt us when we try to explain what L2 is, but it's also helpful that we can keep the scope of services broad. To that end, I completely agree that L2 is user-driven, but in my talks I also advocate that there are L2 services staff can implement that benefit patrons but *also staff.* Something like blogging or RSS feeds of new titles from the catalog can be *huge* time savers for staff, while also providing big benefits for patrons. Even if a patron never subscribes to that feed, the time savings for the staff no longer having to update the "what's new" materials page would be huge. IM reference can save the library money so that we can use it more efficiently for other patron services.

Unfortunately, I don't think L2 can be boiled down to 4 tenets, which could be a good thing or a bad thing.

Posted by: [Jenny Levine](#) | [November 1, 2007 10:10 AM](#)

One of the greatest resistance found between librarians is also about trust on users tagging, instead of vocabulary control. Will it give OPACs better performance, or useless amounts of crap?

As Ryan says, librarians wished to move on, but time and effort spent experimenting is an issue here. And a reasonable one. We need to give them real results, figures, comparisons, and a scientifically approach to show what can be achieved, within Library 2.0, IMHO.

Cheers,

Jorge Serrano-Cobos

Posted by: [Jorge Serrano](#) | [November 1, 2007 06:49 PM](#)

Re: trust on users tagging

That's part of the problem too -- I don't think anyone is saying that this is a replacement for vocabulary control. What I like to say is that there are many ways to skin a cat. I need help deciding which is the best way, and I need the excuse not to be "this is the way I understand best." Staff knowledge and capacity is one factor in implementing technology, but it should not always be a deal breaker.

In the end, lack of willingness to learn new things will always be the major barrier to making informed decisions about user needs and how to satisfy them. Being willing to say "no -- I do not understand this and yes I am willing to learn" is going to be a very much desired trait in our future librarians.

Posted by: [Ryan](#) | [November 2, 2007 12:11 PM](#)

Good points about the importance of understanding the user - and taking an empathic approach to their situation so that you better understand the problem before you try to develop a solution. In fact, you might even say there is more value in being a "problem finder" than a "problem solver". However a mental process for this approach, known in some circles as "design thinking" has been around for quite a bit longer than web 2.0 innovations. This process is at the heart of ADDIE, which has been around in some form or another for at least 50 years. First you conduct the user needs assessment - then you start figuring out how to bridge the knowledge or service gap - or whatever you are trying to improve. A group of bloggers has been exploring this concept is greater depth at Designing Better Libraries (<http://dbl.lishost.org>) - and sometime a web 2.0 application may be a part of the solution.

Posted by: [stevenb](#) | [November 2, 2007 09:36 PM](#)

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