Library mashups: exploring new ways to deliver library data

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The first thing that comes to mind when going through the highly interesting and varied contributions in this volume is – why a book? The key words that come up throughout are 'new', 'dynamic', 'up to date' and 'ongoing', so it seems sensible that the first step is to go to the book website at http://mashups.web2learning.net/ There you will find not only details about the book, but live links, reviews, contacts, presentations and an extremely helpful glossary of the common terms used when discussing mashups…and a definition from the author:

> Mashups (as many of the contributors to this title will tell you) are web applications that use content from more than one source to create a single new service, displayed in a single graphical interface.

I first came across the term mashup at LILAC (Librarians' Information Literacy Conference) in Leeds, UK, in 2006. The speaker was a librarian from a public service who had created a site – we would probably call it an app nowadays – to assist Muslims in refining the direction to Mecca. To do this he had mixed (or 'mingled') a range of openly available sources such as Google maps. This seemed to me a uniquely clever way to adapt web 2.0 technologies and something well within the reach of the profession. This collection not only reinforces that but gives a reflection on how far we have come.

The essays provide a good mix of the technical – what versions, what languages are compatible – and the front end; what works, what finds the best response from users. The book is divided into four helpful (and self-explanatory!) sections; 'What are mashups?' 'Mashing up library websites', 'Mashing up catalog [sic] data', 'Maps, pictures and video – oh my' and 'Adding value to your services'. Each section contains a good mix of four or five pieces on various elements of that theme.

What does strike one about mashups on reading this book is the range of areas, subjects, resources, topics and forums that can now be used. I will just recommend one mashup, given the current extremely harsh weather in the UK (December 2010) and its ingenious name: weatherbonk (http://www.weatherbonk.com/). This is a wonderful mash of webcams, maps, weather updates, route-planning sites and tips, complete with search function. Easy to use, easy to navigate and useful.

The source of many of the articles reflects the North American bias of many developments; however, that should not stop other practitioners from obtaining this book or visiting the website. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in using technology and library resources – in any sector – more imaginatively and effectively.