

'Social networking in libraries': Multimedia Information Technology group (MmIT),

9 July 2010, Liverpool John Moores University

Reviewed by:

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This event was designed to explore and exchange experiences on how social networking tools are being used to promote library services.

Gareth Johnson, from the University of Leicester, started the event by showing his new YouTube video about libraries and social networking. Staff at Leicester started off with a library blog, with clear house rules for content to ensure consistency of style and purpose. It started quietly but gained authority as it was inclusive for the whole university. It now has official recognition and is referred to in the information pack for new staff. Leicester also has a Facebook page, which is maintained by librarians though the information comes from different sources and they do not post content directly to it. It is seen as way of providing information and there is very little interaction. In contrast, the graduate school at Leicester has a Facebook page that is updated much more regularly and is a good example of a two-way conversation. Twitter is a good way of identifying a community and encouraging professional awareness and has been used as another channel for support. Gareth said that using such tools humanises the library and that a lot depends on the personalities,

ethos and culture. It is better to start small, update often and be responsive to feedback from users.

The next speaker was Zelda Chatten, from the University of Liverpool. In early 2006 Liverpool had many subject blogs but it proved hard to keep all of them going. The most successful blog was the e-resources blog, which continues to be updated. This blog now filters information through to Facebook and Twitter. In late 2007 a Facebook page was set up as another way to promote new resources and services and this does get a good response. A Twitter feed was set up for welcome week in 2009 and was publicised in all library inductions. Relevant and interesting tweets are retweeted. The staff found it valuable to follow others as another source of information. Liverpool University library staff like both Facebook and Twitter because they spark interest and keep users aware of the library, in addition to giving the library staff a more 'human' face. Facebook reaches those who never make it as far as the web pages. Zelda also reminded delegates not to forget the 'lurkers' – you may be reaching many more people than those who choose to engage with you.

Dave Pulpett talked about experiences at the London School of Economics. It has a marketing and communications manager, a key role when trying to promote library services. The motivations for getting involved in social media were a need to keep up, a feeling that they 'should' be doing it and to fill gaps. The approach is very much experimental, seeing what happens and accepting that some things will work while others won't. LSE library staff used Twitter as a forum for discussion on their library catalogue but because it was so successful they extended it to cover all areas of the library. Like other libraries, they have a Facebook page and this page is interactive. They use Delicious and have over 1,000 bookmarks. It has proven to be a good tool both for students and for sharing with colleagues. Dave talked about the way forward being mobile, as device usage will increase and we need to develop support for this. LSE has 'LSE mobile' for iPhone, providing university information direct to handsets, and will develop an android version. Dave also saw user feedback and how we respond to it as very important, reviewing what to do with the information our users are giving us via Facebook, Twitter and other social networking tools.

The last speaker was Andrew Walsh, from the University of Huddersfield. As well as a Facebook page they have two twitter feeds at Huddersfield,

one for the main library (@hudlib) and one for the digital repository (@hudeprints), the second proving very successful for academics to promote their own work. This Twitter feed has also been embedded in the library web pages. They have a number of blogs for different purposes, some of which have proved useful for internal communications; for example, the information-literacy blog has helped networking continue between meetings. Andrew also talked about comments and star ratings from users – these started with the library catalogue but are now available on other library pages and their usefulness is being reviewed. The university has also used other web 2.0 tools, but rather than describing these in detail Andrew spent some time looking ahead to the future. Some tools to be aware of are location-based social networking tools like foursquare. These sites use GPS (satellite) software on mobile phones to tell you and other people where you are in real time. It could be interesting to explore the layering of information on these sites.