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# The first six tools for practical Library 2.0



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This article has been adapted from a post on the University of Lincoln's library staff blog<sup>1</sup>.

For at least five years<sup>2</sup>, in articles in the professional press and on the open web, libraries have been urged to modernise, innovate, and develop online library services ("Library 2.0") which reflect the new realities of an interactive, personalised, user-centric read/write internet ("Web 2.0"). However, apart from a few notable exceptions<sup>3</sup> it is not always easy to find useful, *practical* guidance on taking the first steps into Library 2.0.

I have been pleased in the past to have been invited to talk to colleagues, at my university and beyond, about how libraries can take (mostly) free Web 2.0 tools and technologies and use them to make simple, straightforward enhancements to their catalogues, web pages, and services.

Below is a list of six tools I have used in my demonstrations and in my own work. Without exception, these tools are free, or at least universally available within academic libraries. This is the basis of my Library 2.0 toolkit:

## RSS

An acronym which is usually explained as the 'Really Simple Syndication' of web content from one site to another. RSS (and the similar Atom standard), surely represent the one Web 2.0 concept that all libraries should get to grips with, if they have not done so already, as a matter of urgency.

What this syndication does is to take a 'feed' of constantly-changing information from one website and then to display it in any other website. This opens a myriad of possibilities for library websites, underpins most of the other tools in this

list, and yet seems to be only partially appreciated by libraries.

A good video explanation of RSS "in plain English" is available on the Common Craft website<sup>4</sup>.

## GOOGLE READER

One free web application has done more to improve my relationship with the web than any other. With Google Reader<sup>5</sup>, the search giant's own web-based RSS/Atom feed-reading software, I can whizz through dozens of updates from all my favourite websites, all in one place; a task which would take me all day if I had to visit each individual site in turn.

In fact, Google Reader has supplanted email as the first thing I check when I log in each weekday morning. Useful features include folders to organise my feeds, the ability to include 'search alert' feeds from Google search<sup>6</sup>, and the facility to use Google Reader as a simple feed 'blender'<sup>7</sup>.

Disclaimer: other feed readers are available!<sup>8</sup>

## FEED2JS

Feed to JavaScript, a.k.a. Feed2JS<sup>9</sup> is a great tool for turning any valid RSS feed into a bit of code that can be embedded in any web page under your control. Feed2JS is one of the quickest ways of re-using RSS feeds, without having to learn to interpret and modify XML. Libraries can use the centrally-hosted Feed2JS service, or install the open-source software on their own website (which allows more control over speed and reliability).

## JOURNAL TABLES OF CONTENTS

One of the most 'natural' uses to which RSS can be put is to provide feeds of news headlines (see the BBC News website for examples<sup>10</sup>). It's a short step, then, from journalism to academic publishing, and a staggering number of electronic journals' tables-of-contents (TOCs) are now available as RSS feeds.

A number of institutions have built, and now maintain, searchable directories of e-journal TOCs: try the experimental JISC-funded ticTOCs service<sup>11</sup>, or its mature successor, Journal TOCs, which comes with a versatile API (Application Programming Interface)<sup>12</sup>. Or, use the Mimas/British Library Zetoc service to retrieve TOCs for paper journals held by the BL<sup>13</sup>. Finally, the major-

ity of publishers' own websites, and most bibliographic database platforms, also now provide RSS TOC feeds.

Like any RSS feed, journal TOCs can be processed and filtered (for example, using Yahoo! Pipes<sup>14</sup>), then embedded into a web page using Feed2JS – with this combination of tools, a library could build a flexible and powerful periodicals information service for its users.

#### OPEN REFERENCE MANAGEMENT

At a recent conference on recent innovations in reference management software<sup>15</sup>, I was asked to sit on a panel to sum up the day's discussions. My comment (recorded for posterity on video by the Telstar project team<sup>16</sup>) was that the market for reference management is much more open than it was even three years ago, and that the recent influx of new companies and products (including Zotero; Mendeley; CiteULike<sup>17</sup>) seems to be encouraging the established providers of reference management software to re-examine their own offerings – the innovation being driven by this healthy market competition ought to benefit the users of the software and the libraries that support them.

#### LIBRARYTHING

I'm mystified why all libraries aren't raving about the possibilities of the book-lovers' social networking site, LibraryThing. From a personal profile<sup>18</sup> displaying your own book collections (complete with cover images, tagging, and full bibliographic detail), via recommendations<sup>19</sup> based on the similarity of your collections with others', to a range of applications (including free book cover images<sup>20</sup>) by way of group forums<sup>21</sup> and a worldwide library directory<sup>22</sup>... there's a lot here that libraries can use to enhance their services.

#### NOTES

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