

REFER

JOURNAL OF THE ISG

Vol. 24, No. 2

Spring/Summer 2008

ISG (CILIP) Reference Awards 2007	1
ISG Chair's report <i>Helen Bowlt</i>	3
ISG Strategic Plan 2008	4
It's a virtual life: exploring social networks <i>Candace Guite</i>	7
Freedom of information in Scotland <i>Paul Hambelton</i>	16
Long-term access to government information on the web: the Web Continuity Project <i>J. M. Grimshaw</i>	18
Reviews <i>C. A. Toase and David Butcher</i>	22
SCOOP news <i>Jane Inman</i>	25
European Information Association news <i>Maria Bell</i>	29

ISSN 0144-2384

It's a Virtual Life: exploring social networks

Candace Guite, College Librarian, Christ's College, Cambridge

As information librarians we are focused on communication and the need to keep in touch with our user communities. Across a wide age range in the UK, nearly half the population (24 million adults) use one or more social networking sites. Information producers, librarians and users have had to come to terms, in their different ways, with the challenges posed by the exponential growth in social networking sites and the opportunities that Web 2.0 provides. The East of England ISG Spring Meeting on *It's a Virtual Life: exploring social networks* discussed the issues and examined experiences of using Web 2.0. It was held on 17 April 2008 at BT's Adastral Park in Ipswich. Several of the papers are available on the web at www.cilipeoe.org.uk/archives/isg_17thapril.shtml

Social networking

The day began with an overview by **Phil Bradley**, Internet consultant (www.philb.com/) on *Social networking: advantages and disadvantages*. Phil began by painting a picture of the early 1980s when the online world was very different, and of course on a much smaller scale. There were mailing lists and newsgroups but the flow of information was very much a one-way affair. Networks today by contrast provide a wide range of powerful applications allowing users to define and customise profiles and to generate and share content with other site members. Facebook, Bebo and MySpace are the big players with Bebo providing the main social networking site for teenagers. Librarians are not only establishing special interest or place-based groups in Facebook (e.g. Cambridge Librarians) they are also developing applications which allow users to access library catalogues e.g. WorldCat (OCLC) and enquiry access points e.g. Ask a Librarian.

Flickr offers a site dedicated to photo-sharing and Phil reported that there are 2,500 library groups on Flickr featuring events, displays, new books and a 365 Library Days project www.flickr.com/groups/365libs/. LibraryThing allows users to catalogue up to 200 books free and to link up with other site members, thus forming, as they say, 'the world's biggest book club'. Twitter users use 'tweets' (short messages restricted to 140 characters) to keep up to date and in contact via a web interface, from within other sites e.g. Facebook, or from a mobile phone.

All these sites allow their users to locate and connect with friends and colleagues, to connect with 'friends of friends', to share information back and forth, to find new friends, to join discussion groups, and can help to identify subject expertise. So what are the disadvantages?

Personal data and privacy issues are the biggest concern, particularly for younger users. Phil referred to a BBC report that found 25% of 8-11 year-olds

belong to social networking sites and he expressed doubts about the viability of government initiatives to monitor these sites. Then there is the constant commercial backdrop that applies to many of these sites. And when does customisation become invasive? Phil warned that a site called Spokeo is particularly dangerous: it asks you for an email address and then goes through all your contacts. Armed with these it trawls databases such as Amazon and is capable of intuitively guessing other email addresses that belong to your friends/contacts. It then feeds information back to you about these friends/contacts. Membership of social networking sites can also waste huge amounts of time, to the extent that the majority of businesses now ban their employees from accessing these sites in work time.

Individuals clearly may not share their company's policy, and prefer to keep their work and home personas apart but a blanket block on access may also be detrimental to a business or organisation. Phil cited the case of a librarian who worked for English Heritage who was not allowed to use Facebook for 'obvious' reasons. Phil carried out a Facebook search for English Heritage and found nothing. Compare this with the National Trust which has a very big Facebook presence. The Facebook Group for National Trust properties provides users with the opportunity to ask questions about particular properties and for staff to give answers. Phil suggests that the essential question that organisations and institutions need to ask is 'Do you want to be involved in the conversation?' From this evidence one could draw the assumption that English Heritage wasn't interested in talking to people. It is an unfortunate assumption and not necessarily true but it demonstrates the need for librarians as information providers and brokers to engage with these new technologies.

I believe that the integrity and the quality of the data provided on social networking sites should also be an issue for everyone. Authority files, thesauri and the use of controlled vocabulary may appear cumbersome and even elitist but are vital tools in ensuring the quality of the end data. I carried out some sample searches on Flickr for various birds found in the Galapagos and found that the searcher is dependent on the tags the photographer has chosen. For example, if these are very general one gets thousands of hits making it impractical to look through and assess suitability for purpose. I also encountered variant spellings and limited use of scientific names. *Scientific American*² has an account of how some scientists are engaging with Web 2.0 technologies.

Virtual librarians in Second Life (SL)

The next presentation *More questions than answers: the reflections of Maggie Kohime, a virtual librarian in Second Life* was by **Lyn Parker**. Lyn works at Sheffield University Library on the Academic Services Development Team, part of whose remit is to investigate new technologies. And so Maggie Kohime was born on 26 April 2007.

Sheffield's new Information Commons recently won a SCOUNL award for

library design.³ With their new building came a fresh approach to the provision of information, which is centred on enquiry-based learning. Using Web CT they can provide integrated learning resources, including online reading lists and digitised resources.

The 2007 Gartner report on mobile technologies ([www/gartner.com](http://www.gartner.com)) predicted that 80% of active Internet users will have a virtual presence by 2011. Sheffield decided to test the waters and in June 2007 Sheila Webber, senior lecturer at Sheffield's Infolit School applied for temporary office space on EduServ island to host the Centre for Information Literacy Research. There followed a successful bid to CILASS (Centre for Inquiry Based Learning in the Arts and Social Sciences, University of Sheffield) to fund an island for a year allowing the development of virtual teaching and library spaces (Infolit iSchool). Teaching began in October 2007 with a compulsory SL unit for first-year BSc. Information Management students and an Information Literacy class. Sheffield postgraduate students can use the SL space to collaborate on research.

The rationale for librarians (and educators and businesses) to engage in Second Life is not only that some of its users are already here but that it provides a way of reaching some who may never access conventional services. A recent *Guardian* article (10 May 2008) reported on a virtual portal set up jointly by the Spanish Society for Family and Community Medicine and the Coalition for Citizens with Chronic Illnesses - 'Real doctors will log on and offer advice to their anonymous patients. What both will see is an image of a consulting room with a doctor and a typical patient'.

How does Second Life work? It is a three dimensional (3D) virtual world consisting of many islands, was launched by Linden Lab in 2003 and comes complete with land, businesses, buildings and its own exchange rate, the Linden dollar (the exchange rate is L\$185=US\$1). And it is, as the company says on its opening page, largely imagined and created by SL residents (<http://secondlife.com/>). A good computer with broadband is a prerequisite for downloading the software, after which news, upgrades and tutorials will help to get you started. For voice communication a voice card is needed or Instant Messaging and/or Chat can be used. The next step is to select an avatar. For those users who enjoy gaming Second Life will prove an easy transition but for the novice there is much to get used to.

The avatar is a virtual extension of yourself. You get to choose your own first name and then you select a surname from a list. This much is free but if you want to own land or to buy and sell you will have to upgrade from basic membership. Your avatars can teleport or walk or fly within this virtual world. And, as Lyn explained, there are some steep curves to be negotiated not just in the basics of movement but in all manner of things connected with social communication and etiquette. That said, Second Life is an exciting place to visit because it offers a space where genuine creativity can flourish both in business and educational spheres. It also allows for collaborative project work across continents, participants coming together within a virtual classroom

supported on the Second Life Grid. Educators are encouraged to join Linden Lab's education mailing list *SLED* to exchange ideas and experience. Registration is controlled by Linden Lab, with one site for adults and a separate site specifically for teens 13-17 (Teen Second Life) which operates with additional safeguards.

American educational establishments using Second Life include Harvard, Princeton and Stanford. In our own East of England region we have Anglia Ruskin University. The depth of involvement varies, with some merely providing a link to their real time website, whilst others like Edinburgh host a virtual campus. I first heard of Second Life at a previous ISG study day but my interest took wing and gained shape when I visited McMaster University in Ontario, Canada, in 2007. I had a tour of Mills Memorial Library (<http://library.mcmaster.ca/mills/>) with Librarian Jeff Trzeciak and was sufficiently intrigued on hearing that its catalogue could be accessed in Second Life to want to explore the possibilities of this parallel universe with my own avatar. Read more about MacMaster's involvement with SL at <http://libraryplayground.wordpress.com/2007/02/11/hamilton-city-of-the-future/>.

Lyn introduced us to some of the educational possibilities that Second Life supports. They range from movement within 3D space, machinima (animated filmmaking within a real-time virtual 3D environment), architectural and industrial design, medical simulations, social interaction (role-playing) through to the creative arts – theatre, literature, photography, art and music.

How do libraries fit in? Visit some of the libraries in SL's Cybrary City, Info Island, to see what you think. It's a challenge, Lyn says, to design a SL library starting with a blank canvas. Librarians need to think seriously both about how we present ourselves in Second Life and what library services we offer to our users. Should we replicate Real World existing services or can we develop new ways of engaging with our users? On one level it is important simply to have a presence because it represents the beginnings of this engagement with users who have already taken the first step and colonised this virtual space. Ideas to think about for your virtual library might include catalogues, reference type enquiry services, book discussions, library design, video clips, PowerPoint presentations and virtual seminars.

Web 2.0 in the library

We moved from the challenges of SL libraries to the implementation of Web 2.0 in real world libraries as **Phil Bradley** spoke on *Utilising the power of Web 2.0 in your library*. He started with the question of what Web 2.0 is. Tim O'Reilly's definition is that Web 2.0 provides a platform that allows us to harness collective intelligence; data can be used and re-used in many ways and, crucially, users are directly involved with its development. Moreover it is not limited to a single technical device and so provides its users with a richer, broader experience. Google can supply any additional software needed to operate across a range of hardware. Documents can be stored directly on the

Web with bookmarks (Del.icio.us) and edits take place in real time so are not restricted to a particular laptop for example. The bookmarks created in this way, Phil suggests, provide a human index to the Internet and yield faster, more relevant results than a Google search. Web 2.0 technologies make it easier for users to add content, to share information, and to create a web space.

What implications does it have for libraries and librarians? The traditional way of answering a query is to send the enquiry off to different individuals for an answer or to enter an institutional Web CT portal. Information, Phil argued, has been predominantly static hitherto and is accessed in order to copy. The significant change is that now that same piece of information is dynamic. It can be copied, edited, made available out of the institution and added to other resources e.g. the website Zimbio.

The reader has become the collaborator. The user who can add context, embed content, and keep up to date through RSS feeds no longer sits at the edge of the Web but at its very centre. Users can even build and name their own search engines and specify which trusted sites they should trawl, e.g. a search engine that will only trawl from a specified ten academic institutions in a search for Islamic architecture. They can be as small as the user wants or as large as the user specifies: examples include Rollyo, Google Custom Search Builder, Eurekster.swicki and Yahoo Search builder.

Web 2.0 searches are not institution based and so can present librarians with real dilemmas. Institutions provide 'branded' information but Web 2.0 works with open information thus creating a potential for conflict between the library and its parent organisation. It is, Phil says, not a 'thing' but a state of mind. Web 2.0 presents librarians with many new opportunities, for example to set up a Facebook group for a library, have a library tour on YouTube, use instant messaging to deliver information, or create a book club using LibraryThing, Amazon and a weblog. Technical support, he suggested, can sometimes be used to prevent rather than support a library's new applications and initiatives. Phil's recommendation is to go wild! Use a library Wiki to explore ideas with other library professionals, listen to your users, create new resources and overcome the obstacles that technical support may put in your way. There is no place for arguments against implementation such as limited resources and limited time. Web 2.0 is fundamentally changing the way we do our jobs, interact with people, and the way in which we use information.

Online communities

The afternoon session looked at three very different examples of online communities: BT's Hubbub (<http://hubbub.labs.bt.com/>), Mildenhall College of Technology's online forum, and our own professional forum CILIP communities (<http://communities.cilip.org.uk/forums/default.aspx>).

Hubbub

We heard first from **Simon Thompson** on *The Hubbub Experience: Forums for support*. Simon is a principal researcher in the Intelligent Systems

Research Centre at BT Adastral Park. He explained how substantial research had gone in to the Hubbub project to get it right. BT's starting point was an in-depth look at forums. What implications did the Hubbub project have and how could it be used for business? The team looked at examples of consumer-led forums critical of the industry such as Openwoe and NT Hellworld. These sites have great power and can influence consumer choice and the future development of the industry. Ultimately, Simon said that the endless negativity actually led to a consumer backlash against Openwoe. Consumers and users can bring considerable expertise, knowledge and loyalty to the products and it is this positive knowledge base that BT wanted to bring to the Hubbub forum.

One of the 'best practice' models that BT considered is the Apple forum (<http://discussions.apple.com>). Although the team had a high regard for the way in which information was shared through the forum they had serious concerns about the Apple page as it was felt to have too much information for ease of navigation. The Slash site with its clear and simple design provided a good model but the team felt that the forum was too moderated.

Engineering a design that can handle lots of pieces of complex information without losing the thread of each single enquiry as it sifts its way through the forum software is a real challenge. Poor design leads to the loss of requests and poor threading and metadata. The BT fix was to identify the website round a particular user journey. Kevin Hoyle initiated the idea: it was to be a functional tool, with a simple design, explicit, and accessible to the user. A cross-company team was formed with BT Retail, R & V social networking and Customer advocacy with a clear objective; the forum of these ad-hoc communities of customers would reduce support costs and improve the customer experience and perception of BT. The BT Hubbub project began in 2005; the forum was trialled in early 2006 and went live later the same year. The key driver of traffic on the forum is via Google searching. Within the first year the site reached monthly averages of 18,000 unique customers and 600,000 hits and today there are currently 4,300 unique browsers per day. What's different about this BT site? Well, every visit to the landing page produces a question and more often than not the search results provide an answer to the questions. Those questions that are not answered are categorised by their use to other users, not by the topic that they were placed in. The strength of the system is in its comprehensive knowledge base allowing services to converge for the benefit of the BT customer. Future developments aim to keep the customer at the centre of the Hubbub forum by developing widget-type architecture, a plug-in so that support can be delivered to the customer wherever he or she happens to be.

Mildenhall College's Virtual Learning Environment

Sacha Cinnamond, Head of the Sixth Form at Mildenhall College of Technology (<http://www.mct.suffolk.sch.uk/>), spoke on *A Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)*. Suffolk County Council asked the College to pilot a VLE and Sacha outlined some of the benefits that a VLE can bring, such as a greater

focus on learning as opposed to teaching and the possibility of shaping resources to meet individual needs of pupils.

Mildenhall's VLE uses Netmedia which is very user-friendly. It works with templates, thus allowing non-experts to create web pages. Teachers can set tasks for classes or individual pupils; access, assign and receive students' work from home; carry out electronic marking; access the internal email system and access electronic templates.

There were three distinct projects for the students. For the Sixth Form, a Student Voice project known as the 'Sixth form Zone' is managed by the senior prefects and provides an opportunity for individual talents to shine. The Zone hosts a bulletin board, a social/college calendar, advice on study skills, a film/photo gallery of sixth-form events, surveys e.g. on summer ball ideas, voting functions e.g. what to do with charity money, and homework discussion through the Sixth Form Forum. The latest hot topics for the forum were recent predictive software, the Sixth Form Computer Room and the issues around dining hall behaviour.

One of the unpredicted benefits of the Sixth Form Forum is that the school administration can develop a greater understanding of issues that affect all students as some students who wouldn't normally speak up do find a voice in the Forum. Discussion in the Forum can lead to the resolution of some practical issues and it can also be the source of completely new initiatives. The Forum is self-policing and obviously popular: it received sixty postings in two weeks. Sacha summed up the overall benefits: it facilitates a 'learning community' and has created a real sense of ownership and commitment to the Sixth Form. It has also proved a useful sound-bed for new ideas and facilitated communication between staff and students.

The second project was Class Teaching Papers. This comprised lesson outlines, the calendar, the class journal and a discussion group. The discussion group was based around an online chat room, the class notice board included information about school trips and other key dates. Class files used Whiteboard to allow students to catch up with work that may have been missed due to illness or work that needed additional reinforcement.

The third project area was the school's contribution to the Comenius programme (http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/comenius/index_en.html). This is an EU/British Council initiative whose purpose is to encourage collaboration between European schools on key issues such as the environment and democratic reform. Individuals learn new skills and gain an appreciation of other cultures through such collaboration. The programme provides some funding for exchange visits but Mildenhall's new VLE offers a virtual space in which preparatory work from all the participating schools can be mounted. Geographical distance is no longer an obstacle: all a student needs is a room and a computer at home to fully participate in the project. The school's Comenius project space includes a photo album, a democracy forum, a diary, an open journal, student work files and presentations. These can all be linked to video-conferencing work. Video conferencing presents students with

a different kind of challenge – of language, culture and history.

Mildenhall has also experimented with having the VLE open in the classroom so, for example, a topic can be posted on the forum and then students sent home to develop the topic further through the Forum. Giving students this greater responsibility has proved an excellent way of teaching the art of debate and critical analysis. There are also benefits in involving other family members particularly with topics of which they had personal experience e.g. war. Forum work undertaken at home also means that there is no escape through absenteeism!

From this experience, Sacha says that he has learnt the need to enthuse staff and to have good technical support. It is crucial to have someone in overall charge of your VLE to provide a joined up ICT strategy, for only in this way can your VLE become fully integrated into everyday school life. It is evident that Mildenhall's sixth-formers are an admirable next generation: lively, independent and well informed. I think we all borrowed some ideas from them.

Cilip Communities

The final case study of an online community was for librarians. **Lyndsay Rees-Jones**, Senior Advisor, Membership Services Unit from CILIP spoke on *Your virtual professional community or membership and real engagement*. Cilip Communities (<http://communities.cilip.org.uk/>) was launched in 2007. It was created in direct response to the election hustings for Cilip Council in 2007. Discussion about the election, the candidates, and the way forward for 2008 were hot topics on private members' forums. Cilip responded quickly by establishing a forum that was open to all members as participants.

Phase 1 of the project provided website pages, email lists, forums and blogs for members with peer to peer communication but it still retained a 'them and us' feel. Phase 2 'loosened the boundaries'. Information now flowed not just peer to peer but from external sources, e.g. members' websites, other social networking sites and RSS feeds in to the centre. A pilot version of the Phase 2 model was tested with 700 members and the test posting 'Demonstrating your value' in order to develop a set of guidelines.

Cilip Communities breaks down into four key areas:

- Cilip - the organisation
- Cilip - practical questions and answers
- Cilip - hot topics
- Cilip - the community

Any member can set up a community and different forums serve different Cilip communities e.g. the Advocacy forum 'Chapter 1' which is for graduate trainees. Phase 3 of the project looked at ways of developing integration and of avoiding replication within the existing structure.

Cilip Communities was clearly in good shape in time for the 2008 Cilip Council elections with candidates' biographies and manifestos available and 142 postings to the electronic hustings. There are plans to develop the forum

further for the benefit of members and Cilip has already committed some funds to enable this research. Lyndsay reported that work on developing a wiki and enhanced profiling would be under way this autumn. Members have high expectations of their professional forum: it needs to be ethical and secure whilst fully engaging with the wide range of concerns and issues of its members.

BT Adastral Park provided us with a very good venue for the day with plenty of parking and good public transport links and an excellent lunch. Our thanks to BT and to Fay Owston for hosting the day.

References

1. Click and tell, *Sunday Times Magazine*, 3 February 2008.
2. 'Science 2.0: The risks and rewards of web-based research' *Scientific American*, May 2008, pp. 46-51.
3. 'Libraries unleashed' *Guardian* 22 April 2008.