

Reaching the audience using podcasts, SMS/texting and blogs at the University of Newcastle Library

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Abstract

This paper discusses and highlights the ongoing journey at the University of Newcastle Library in the use of emerging Web 2 technologies. The University of Newcastle Library staff have “looked ahead” and identified new and exciting ways of delivering Library Information and services to assist clients, either in person or online. Specific initiatives we developed which supported the goal of using emerging Web 2.0 technologies to facilitate user collaboration to resource sharing and effective use of the Library website.

New ways to reach the audience

The University of Newcastle (UoN) Library is constantly looking at fresh and exciting ways of delivering Library services to assist clients, in person, or online. One of the most effective vehicles used to deliver services and resources is the Library website.

Library staff function in a converged Library & IT environment, and support is delivered face to face and online. The main objective is to give staff and students almost seamless access to materials and services to assist the University coursework on and off the Campus.

A by-product of having computing facilities located within the Library is that space has been redefined to be a social gathering place as well as a learning area. Technology motivates the types of services and further opens the door to allow delivery to suit various learning styles.

The UoN Library operates proactively by encouraging and eliciting feedback from clients. This is pivotal to guide Library strategic planning in order to not only satisfy the University Strategic Goals, but also to be suitable for the needs of clients who use the Library and related services to complete coursework.

Several types of formal and informal processes are used to gain feedback from clients. One way is via the InSync Survey (formerly Rodski & Ambit Insights) conducted biennially. In 2006, almost 4,500 responses were received as a result of the InSync Survey. Clients were asked for their perceptions of the importance and performance of a core set of variables such as communication, service quality, service delivery, facilities & equipment and Library Staff. The results help to identify the most important priorities for clients, to be targeted as part of strategic and operational planning for the Library for the next five years.

The survey confirmed that three of the top ten issues and priorities identified by all groups included:

- Access to computers to support study / research
- Access to electronic resources is easily available
- Off-campus access to electronic information resources and services

Both undergraduate and postgraduate students identified that access to computers and easily found course-specific resources, are issues that require improvement. Postgraduates identified the library web site be easy to use, as their top priority.

Information Services planned new services to align goals, listed in the Library's "Building Distinction in Library Services" document.

Specific initiatives were developed to support two objectives.

- enhance the 24 hour access and support in the Information Common (AIC)
- Introduce a SMS reference service and bring into play emerging Web 2.0 technologies, to facilitate user collaboration, and enrich access to the Library website.

A trigger to prompt use of emerging technologies is current literature, which discusses the new “Library 2.0” concept. Library 2.0 can be defined as a service philosophy, a theory, that attempts to guide libraries in their efforts to use emerging technologies to help reach more people. Library 2.0 is not about searching, but finding not about access, but sharing. (Maness, 2006)

At the UoN, the Information Common (AIC) is an environment combining technology, information resources and professional assistance in a vibrant relaxed work and learning space. The AIC zone has strong design elements, computers, scanners, printers, and wireless access and laptop capabilities, with first level IT support.

A large part of a Library’s culture is to share and function as facilitators to guide the audience to seek, find and utilise whatever is required. At times, the methods used essentially can make processes complicated for clients. While the InSync Survey identified that, the Library website should be straightforward, change required compatibility within the framework of the current University website. Staff looked for new and emerging social technologies to enhance existing content. Overall content of the University and Library web site is instructive and in depth. For numerous reasons, it was considered that content should be reorganised to be in touch with the “audience”

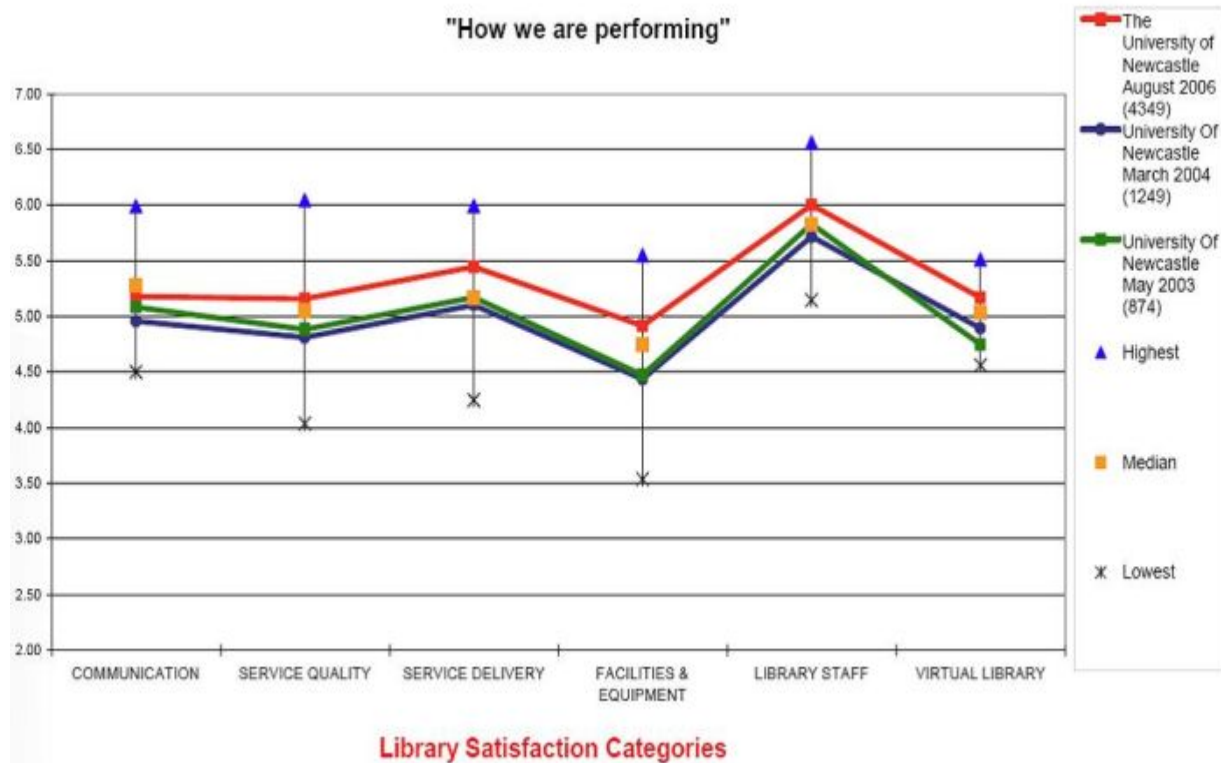
The InSync survey clearly identified the following positives below.

“Our subscription to over 60,000 electronic journals allows university staff and students to access to resources 24 hours a day from any location that has internet facilities.

..... A number of tutorials can be downloaded from the library website at your convenience, as well as subject guides, FAQ’s and many other useful library resources.”

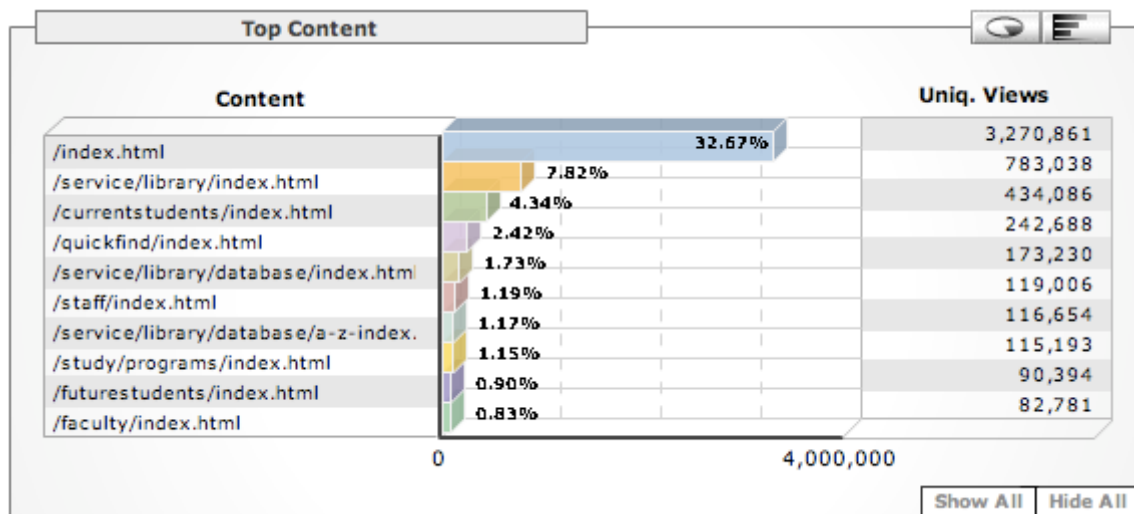
Satisfaction and performance – opportunities for improving

The graph below illustrates how results achieved positive changes over the years, with 2006 results shown in red. It is obvious from a casual glance that there has been a significant improvement in patron satisfaction. Results also show that we are now performing above the average level when measured against other Australian and New Zealand Universities who have conducted the survey



In May 2006, the University of Newcastle implemented Google Analytics across its entire website. Visits to Library pages accounted for 20% of all unique views of the website in 2006. Approximately 63% of traffic to Library pages is internal visits.

Three separate Library pages featured in the Top 10 viewed pages list in the 2006 annual report and this trend has continued throughout 2007.



Project plan

By way of the survey results, and to satisfy clients, Library staff put forward a project to encompass reorganising and enhancing existing web content, and to introduce new services using emerging technologies, such as podcasting, which can facilitate information literacy by highlighting Library resources and services. The planning stage identified the Library and University websites as comprehensive, although confusing to navigate. Hence, the focus of the project broadened to bring and blend information together to highlight areas throughout the academic year, using existing content and add podcasts to advertise a specific service or physical space.

In the Library, the Reference and Information desks delivered core services that helped new and existing clients to access and use scholarly information. Clients would arrive at the Library Information Desks without understanding how to find the appropriate resources, begin research, or to take advantage of services available freely. In order to help the user, desk staff referred to numerous web pages to provide an overview to get started. The client need could be as basic as access to online services or staff would demonstrate how to accomplish specialised subject research. At the beginning of semester/trimester, the same information is repeated multiple times to new clients. To simplify the process, an idea was put forward to generate one straightforward page to combine all of this information, and also use this page to broadcast podcasts. The aim was to present to the client a clear-cut starting point.

People who have finished their University studies may not realise that the use of web-based systems is significant and standard practice nowadays. Technology is capable of creating a hindrance and an enormous amount of time wasted as clients endeavour to start the information seeking process. A number of Postgraduate students are surprised at the outset of their studies at the standard use of technology that is required at University these days.

To give an example: upon enrolling at UoN, students have a number of IT and Online Services to assist and furnish an innovative learning and teaching environment.

Services may include access to web-based systems for email, use of the University Intranet or Internet University modems, or the University Labs network on campus. Additional online systems are available for printing, photocopying, enrolments, tutorial registrations, online exam results, and use of the wireless network.

The University also uses Blackboard, a web-based system utilised to support flexible teaching and learning, face-to-face and off campus. Blackboard permits lecturers to post grades, information, and assignments. Online discussions are available and students can turn in assignments through Blackboard.

The Library is a place for student use of computers, and many questions generated at the Library Reference and Information Desk are about services delivered by other University Units such as IT or the Student Hubs. The Hubs are central areas on campus that allow students a one-stop shop for student administrative or academic progression

matters. The Library assists in supporting these processes and above-mentioned systems at contrasting levels.

As soon as students begin their coursework the type of questions received at the Desk change, finding information resources or using Library related services is the next focal point. The Desk has a series of its own “seasons”, as the nature of information or questions change as semester/trimester advances. Regardless of the need of the client, everyone must pass through numerous University, and Library WebPages to obtain what is called for at the outset. As the University has over 1.2 million items circulating in the collections, the simple task of finding a book on the shelf requires the use of the Library catalogue, another web-based system.

A new web page was conceptualised to be a central channel so to speak, to help our main target audience, the student body of over 26,000 students. The page is a tool to start quickly and easily without getting lost in the existing labyrinth of multiple web pages one needed to navigate. The new page divides into the following sections:

- Library top 10 things to know – a zone that fuses links to existing web pages from the Library and other University units.
- Get up to speed - this is where students can access online tutorials or information about Referencing or subject guides
- Podcasts listen at your leisure – audio or instructional files covering topics such as physical areas like the Information Common, Orientation information, or the wireless network and online required readings.

Each heading has links with the intention of directing students to use services from all units across the University to find out how to do a range of basic tasks, through to learning how to research. From any student’s perspective, these are fundamentals and shape the core business delivered at the Library Reference & Information Desks. The page has the title Hear Do Learn, as this describes the overall intention .The new page was to be used to house the podcasts we intended to make.

Podcasting is a new way to offer information at UoN that suited the range of technologies currently available, in addition to accommodating students of the new millennium. Another advantage that staff realised is that podcasting would post detailed information still obtainable if students missed any physical events held for Information Literacy or Orientation. Staff decided to present podcasts in three ways:

- an audio recording available to be downloaded
- an instructive sound and image file using Macromedia Captivate,
- entertaining podcasts created to promote the Library space or services.

Staff brainstormed how the podcasts would be deliverable and researched the use of digital web based lecture recordings and other technologies.

Adopting emerging web-based technologies (WBLT)

Podcasting is a digital recording of a radio broadcast or similar program, made available on the Internet for downloading to a personal audio player. Podcasting is quite common these days and describes the technology to push audio content from websites down to anyone who wants to listen on their iPod or any other MP3 player. Podcasting uses an XML-based technology called RSS, or Really Simple Syndication. Content publishers describe new content in an XML RSS file, which includes dates, titles, descriptions, and links to MP3 files. This auto-generated file is called an RSS feed.

Current literature considers the ways in which technology is being adapted in teaching. The iPod experiments project at Duke University is just one of the various examples found in which the teaching arena uses iPods. An increasing number of academics use this technology to deliver lectures, and study materials are made available to students via iPods and other MP3 players.

The growing use of MP3 audio players and significant use of mobile iPods has increased in popularity. Many students do own or have access to these devices in Australia.

How could we Podcast?

Reading current literature, iPod use is diverse. Further research brought the awareness that the University of Newcastle was using the web-based system Lectopia to make recordings of lectures and then distributing them via the Online Learning System Blackboard. Lectopia (also known as the iLecture System) is used to deliver informative, instructional or even entertaining information and is a leading lecture capture and delivery solution developed by the University of Western Australia. Content can also be transferred to a portable player such as an iPod, or MP3. Newcastle University is collaborating with a number of Australian Universities on a research project to answer the question of how iLecture and similar web-based lecture technologies can be used to best effect to support learning and teaching.” (Gosper, et al 2007)

Lectopia had the flexibility of being able to download and use files without the need for staff or students to undertake specialised training. Library management supported the idea to use Lectopia to make “podcasts” of library information to be available on the web to be used anywhere at anytime in a choice of delivery modes. The topics to cover would change at various times to accommodate what was happening throughout semester/trimester.

Experimenting with Podcasting

The challenging part of any project is trying something new, and while podcasting is not a new idea it was a new concept. The reality of podcasting is the simple process of preparing and distributing audio files. However, any use of the word podcast appeared to prompt an assortment of positive and negative opinions with Library staff in the planning stages of this project, and the type of podcasts recorded had to encourage the user to want to listen and learn.

The following points are useful guidelines to follow when planning and delivering a podcast

- a script is written and adhered to for every new topic
- over time scripts would need to be revised to accommodate change
- podcasts should only run for 2 to 5 minutes in length as it was felt listeners would switch off after a few minutes no matter how detailed or entertaining the content
- a range of voices would be used to add variety and voice tone should be as natural as you would speak in normal conversation
- language and content should be entertaining as well as informative and simple
- music or sounds could be added, although copyright issues needed to be adhered to
- practice more than once before recording

Podcasts were made using the Lectopia system and this was an easy process. The University has many venues with access to Lectopia available in lecture theatres, classrooms, and studios that can be booked for recording sessions. Conveniently, a studio is located in the Auchmuty Library at Callaghan Campus, where the majority of School Librarians are.

Lectopia has detailed information available about how to access and use the system and information from capture to delivery is available in the next section of this document.

Lectopia from Capture to Delivery

Media Acquisition and Publishing Management

Lectopia is about the function of recording live events - these events may be lectures or other modes of presentation. It also easily supports capturing pre-recorded analogue media. Lectopia includes an advanced web-based management tool called the Lectopia Administration Tool. This tool enables administrators to configure different aspects of

the system, schedule recordings, and to monitor the overall system activity including recording and processing functions

Flexible Media Processing

The Lectopia model provides sophisticated control over the processing of captured recordings is easily customised to use an extensive range of media formats, compression formats, codecs, bandwidths and delivery protocols. It supports the majority of major streaming media formats including QuickTime, MPEG 4, Windows Media and Real. In addition to supporting multiple media formats, Lectopia supports multiple media delivery servers. The system is capable of publishing media to any number of streaming and web delivery servers.

The media-processing model developed with reliability and redundancy. Installation is configured with a number of processing computers that perform with cluster-like behaviour. The processing activity is granular to maximise cluster efficiency, enable detailed trouble-shooting, and complete

Delivery of Media to Clients

The Lectopia system was developed to deliver media to clients using standard Internet delivery technologies including web browsers, media players, and plug-ins. The exact requirements of client computers depends partly on the custom formats used by a Lectopia installation, however generally a modern PC or Mac using Internet Explorer, Safari or some other common web browser is suitable. Multi-platform support for clients is a fundamental aspect of the Lectopia System.

The media-processing model also supports multiple delivery protocols such as rtsp, http, and ftp. In normal circumstances, a variety of media formats will be accessible for a particular scheduled recording. As the UoN uses Blackboard to deliver Lectopia media to clients, creating a non-standard course is all that is required to become a user of the Lectopia system.

Lectopia was not the only way podcasts were completed The Library also purchased two MP3-portable units that deliver exceptional sound quality and have voice recording capability. Following the recording, free editing software was used and the file published as an MP3. This is easy to do and by accessing information and free tutorials on the Internet, you can teach yourself to do this. Hosting a published file is via a web site, in this case the Hear Do Learn page.

Access is open to anyone who cares to listen.

Another venture is instructive sound and image files, produced using Macromedia Captivate to create small "movies". Captivate allows the creation of rich, engaging simulations. Bandwidth is the major factor when planning any project and the length and content of this type of format and the published file size is the essential consideration.

Results

The following image is a screen shot of the completed Hear Do Learn page.

The screenshot shows a web page titled "HEAR - DO - LEARN" with a blue header. The page is organized into three columns:

- Podcasts - Listen at your leisure:** Contains four items: "2007 Welcome" (2 minutes), "AIC" (3.25 minutes), "Using the Library: a beginner's guide" (3 mins), and "See how to use our web pages" (4 mins). A "2007 Library Tours" link is at the bottom.
- Library top 10 things to know:** Lists services like "Logging In", "Activate Access", "Create a PIN", "MyLibrary", "Short Loans", "PrintCopy System", "Access from Home", "Wireless Network", "Ask a question", and "Self-Service Options".
- Get up to speed:** Lists resources like "Newcat tutorials", "Infoskills", "Subject Resource Guides", "Referencing", "How do I", "Endnote", "Itskills", "Virtual Tours", and "Learning Support Program".

The content of the page uses existing links available on the Library and University website. Content was organised to deliver the core information to, enable a direct approach to use computing and Library resources and services. The intention is to make the process uncomplicated for the client to take only what is required at the point of need, diminishing information overload or the need to navigate multiple separate web pages.

The page is unique in design, and is a single access point, using the concept of a portal. The page is a pathway to start from with the choice of returning as the academic year progresses, and content adjusted. Standard links that are included on the page are to the existing online training modules that support and enhance information literacy. Clients can pivot from this page to streamline their information trek in much the same way we use a global positioning system (GPS) to take the quickest route from point A to B.

Podcasting in the future

So far, the opportunity to evaluate needs further time. In the Academic Year at UoN, the first semester intake has the largest number of students, and by June 2008, formal processes will gauge feedback from the users. Early in 2008, the use and number of topics will increase, despite the achievements so far being from a project team using only a few people. The time taken to work on the project was between existing duties and as the work planned is completed, any further podcasts or investigation into new technologies has to have dedicated staff and time. We have taken the initiative, with

support from Library Management, of contacting Academics from the Communications School to ask if current students would like to be involved and collaborate to produce podcasts. This is still in process, although we feel this would be the best way to proceed. The reasoning is that the students themselves would perceive and deliver information in the way other students would want to listen or learn. Further exploration in the future is social book marking, as the Hear Do Learn page is a series of what the Library feels are useful links for clients to use and share.

Virtual Reference Services - Background

Previously the Library used a Virtual Chat service to respond to staff and student queries. Library Staff had to remain at their desks at the time of service to push web pages or respond to questions live online. Inherent problems existed with rostering, training and reliable connections. Software issues experienced after a network upgrade finally forced its closure. Our new move is an online email-based reference service.

Beyond Email: SMS

The Library replaced virtual chat software with RefTracker Reference and Request Management, a purpose built product from Altarama, rebadged at the University of Newcastle Library as ASAPinfo.

RefTracker has a comprehensive interface that links all the diverse ways you can receive and deliver reference services - by email, by phone, by mail, by fax, in person, and via links to communications tools such as co-browsing, Instant Messaging, VoIP, and SMS/Texting.

Support for virtual reference, with the use of mobile phones, recognised another way to provide students with instant access to Library information services. The Library took up the option of introducing SMS/texting to provide short reference queries, for opening hours and general information requests. The service has been operating since early May 2007 and advertised via the ASAPinfo web page as an alternative option for students and staff to contact the Library.

The service is simple to use: SMSs send to an email address and responses are created in an email using the "reply" function. The responses automatically deliver to the client's mobile phone by SMS. The service initially offered 9am - 5pm, Monday to Friday, but hours have now increased with the student support staff, who are working overnight and weekends in the 24x7 AIC environment monitoring SMS questions. Staff keep messages brief and do not include unnecessary characters including signatures.

The new service is advertised with posters and a brochure at library information desks, a webpage and via a large plasma screen located in the AIC environment. Delivery issues exist with SMS messages that can cause delays or even fail, due to problems with the connections between different telephone carriers. Potential users are aware of this and SMS charging information is provided, as there is no additional charge from our service provider for sending the SMS message, or for receiving a reply from us. SMS can be expanded beyond general reference queries to sending reminders for overdue

books, emergency messages, audio & video tours or sending photos to a library Flickr site. (Horizon Report, 2007)

Example questions and answers

*Am i able 2 get 1 of my friends b pick up i book i had on hold?

You must give written authority and friend can pick up

*I have a book 2 b p/u 2day, can i extend p/u 2 2moro?

Holds are avail for 5 days then it goes to next hold or returned to shelf

*can you borrow book in law reserve

Items may be borrowed for a 2 hour period or photocopied within Law Reserve

Blogging in Libraries – Background

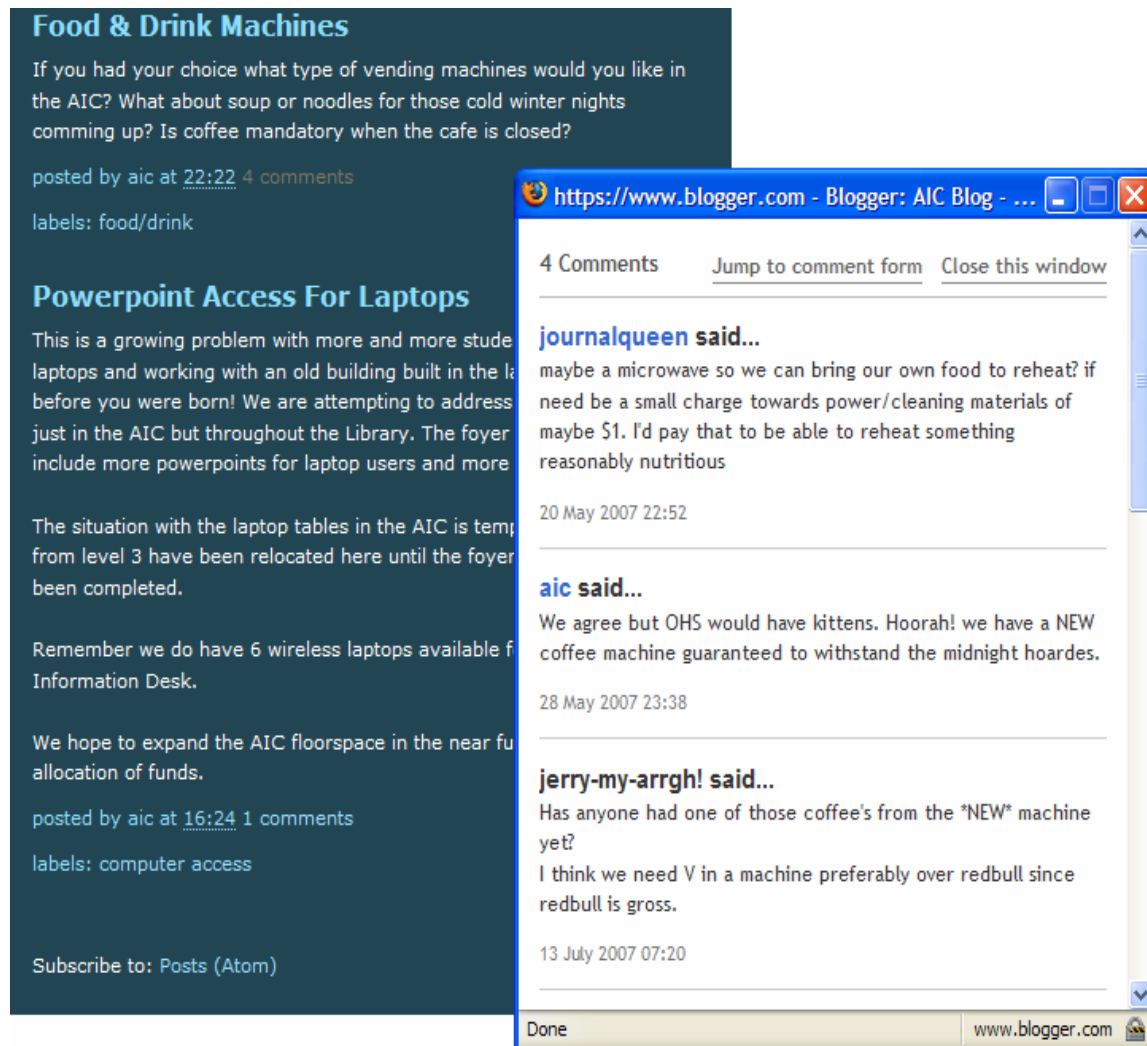
The use of social networking recognises that Information seeking behaviours have changed. University students, primarily young students, are using other types of information services or using sources recommended by friends, rather than traditional sources found in Libraries. Social networking is not new, but a new generation uses virtual social networking sites such as MySpace, and Facebook as relatively safe places to gather. Earlier generations used social networking spaces such as “the pictures” shopping centres, discos, pool halls and milkbars.

MySpace.com attracted more than 114 million global visitors aged 15 and older in June 2007. Libraries need to attract students through the channels that they prefer to use. Building social networking areas for interaction, e.g. blogs, allows staff to promote and inform students of services which will help improve their Information literacy skills.

Blogs at Newcastle Library

The Library added a blog about our Information Common. The 24x7 area opened over 3 years ago, and while a Suggestion Box allowed students to comment on what they liked and disliked, as well as requested enhancements, it was difficult to respond directly. While we have a feedback page on our website, where we respond to general library comments the Information Common (AIC) has specific issues that do not suit a general feedback page. A monthly newsletter only added to the overload of paper-based products. The idea of using a blog based on the concept behind blogging and its ability to allow an interactive environment for a specific community. Students could provide feedback on policy not just to us but also back to themselves as a group, to hear about any issues, example “What was the consensus for acceptable behaviour with mobile phone conversations?” “What is the role of the student support staff?”

Blog example AIC



The image shows a Blogger blog page with two posts and a comment window. The first post is titled "Food & Drink Machines" and asks about vending machines in the AIC. The second post is titled "Powerpoint Access For Laptops" and discusses laptop access in the library. A comment window is open over the second post, showing three comments from "journalqueen", "aic", and "jerry-my-arrgh!".

Food & Drink Machines
If you had your choice what type of vending machines would you like in the AIC? What about soup or noodles for those cold winter nights comming up? Is coffee mandatory when the cafe is closed?
posted by aic at 22:22 4 comments
labels: food/drink

Powerpoint Access For Laptops
This is a growing problem with more and more stude laptops and working with an old building built in the before you were born! We are attempting to address just in the AIC but throughout the Library. The foyer include more powerpoints for laptop users and more
The situation with the laptop tables in the AIC is temp from level 3 have been relocated here until the foyer been completed.
Remember we do have 6 wireless laptops available f Information Desk.
We hope to expand the AIC floorspace in the near fu allocation of funds.
posted by aic at 16:24 1 comments
labels: computer access
Subscribe to: Posts (Atom)

4 Comments [Jump to comment form](#) [Close this window](#)

journalqueen said...
maybe a microwave so we can bring our own food to reheat? if need be a small charge towards power/cleaning materials of maybe \$1. I'd pay that to be able to reheat something reasonably nutritious
20 May 2007 22:52

aic said...
We agree but OHS would have kittens. Hoorah! we have a NEW coffee machine guaranteed to withstand the midnight hoardes.
28 May 2007 23:38

jerry-my-arrgh! said...
Has anyone had one of those coffee's from the *NEW* machine yet?
I think we need V in a machine preferably over redbull since redbull is gross.
13 July 2007 07:20

Another blog was implemented on the Library index page, for the latest news. Throughout the 2007 June storms that Newcastle experienced, when the bulk carrier the "Pasha Bulker" stranded on Nobby's Beach, the Callaghan Campus of the University closed for two days. This closure was prior to mid-semester exams that were to start the following week, and many students wanted to know when the Campus would reopen, as they were preparing for their exams. The Library news blog was used to post information that was the latest to be had anywhere on the University site.

The Cultural Collections unit of the Library, incorporating the Archives, Rare Books, and Special Collections runs a blog. The collections housed in this area are rich and diverse, and are being preserved and brought to life by using the blog for news items about events related to collections held, and by publishing photographs, as well as digitised works from archives and special collections to a Flickr site <http://www.flickr.com/photos/uon/>. There is a "thank you" comment posted on this Blog, from a primary school child who

used material for a school project from the Flickr site, which reflects part of Cultural Collections role of community engagement.

Blogs are easy to manage and an entire blog can be migrated from one service to another. The AIC Blog originally created using Google's Blogger and when the Library's Web Manager and Cultural Collections began using Wordpress the AIC Blog migrated as well to improve staff access and management of all Blogs.

Concerns rose from staff about the freedom of users to make comments. Contributions to Blogs are capable of being monitored and comments vetted. The Library has a team of staff monitoring and posting information as required. Overall, so far Blogs have been an effective and economic way to create a two-way communication with Library users.

Looking further ahead

A large majority of NetGeneration students own information communications technology (ICT) devices, and expect to be able to use them while at University. Trends in academic libraries are using new technologies, and the future will see virtual domains like the current Second Life, a virtual world entirely built and owned by the users, that could assist students with different information seeking behaviours. Gaming technology used by children today will be the norm at Universities within ten years. In the future Information Literacy may be virtual, when a student adopts an avatar, leading them around and mentoring online, travelling through the virtual walls of a library to complete quests to find information.

While here in our library we have been encouraged to experiment with podcasts, flash movies and blogs to extend and enhance access for students, we depend on other University service units such as the Web Management Unit and Information Technology teams to support these initiatives. This interdependency can often see work at cross-purposes. Careful planning is required for those libraries wanting to employ these new services as some institutions see the use of blogs, wikis and even non-standardised web pages as problematic and hard to control.

In the University of Newcastle Library, we will continue to plan and use technology as a tool to enhance and refine existing content, plan new projects, and opportunities that create communication channels that our users "switch on", listen to, learn, and interact with. This is a virtual iteration of our vision of the Library as "A quality learning environment where people are inspired to explore research, create, reflect, and grow."

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