Library 2.0 and Beyond: Innovative Technologies and Tomorrow's User

Homanchuk, Alex

Courtney, Nancy, ed. **Library 2.0 and Beyond: Innovative Technologies and Tomorrow's User**. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2007. 152 pp. 45.00 USD. ISBN-10: 1-59158-537-6. ISBN-13: 978-1-59158-537-4. ∞

This slim volume edited by Nancy Courtney contains articles from an assemblage of prominent authors recognized for their contributions to the recent discussion of the implications of Web 2.0 technologies for libraries. Many of the contributors to **Library 2.0 and beyond: Innovative Technologies and Tomorrow's User** are librarians who have been acknowledged within the field for being early adopters of these technologies and for their original contributions to the study of the library 2.0 phenomenon. This book endeavors to evaluate a sizable selection of tools and services that have in recent years led libraries to dramatically reconsider the web-based services they offer.

Steven J. Bell's preface provides a suitable outline of the succeeding eleven chapters adequately setting readers' expectations. Each of the authors selects a favourite Web 2.0 technology, discusses its use, and shares ideas on how the technology can be effectively implemented within libraries. The extensive list of technologies and services introduced within this volume includes Wikis, blogs, podcasts, online social networking, tagging, mashups, digital storytelling, virtual worlds and video games. Bell also makes the case for keeping up with these emerging technologies, arguing that user behaviours and expectations have been reshaped by the Web 2.0 world they now dwell within. Bell suggests that libraries should consider this developing participatory online environment in evaluating and improving services and extending opportunities to users to "…participate in the production of content for our information resources and our websites" (p. xi).

The first article in this collection is authored by Elizabeth Black and presents a concise and informative history of Web 2.0. Black artfully weaves together threads delineating the design and social principles of Web 2.0 as proffered by thought leaders such as Tim O'Reilly and Tim Berners-Lee. While some aspects of Web 2.0 may remain contentious, some of the commonly agreed upon principles include treating the "Web as a platform" for developing Web-based applications and a tendency towards increased reliance upon user contributed content in building successful online applications.

A common theme that finds resonance throughout this text is that user participation is vital to the growth and success of Web 2.0 applications. In the Web 2.0 world users contribute content such as reviews, tags, ratings, and even new applications without needing to be Web designers or programmers. This design principle often relies upon the "wisdom of the crowds" to harness and evaluate user contributed content to enhance Web services, improve communications and otherwise create resources that would be too time consuming or costly for smaller groups to develop. Social tagging and folksonomies, discussed by Ellyssa Kroski, perfectly illustrates the principle of

harnessing the "wisdom of the crowds" to improve services. One library related application she describes allows for user tagging alongside the library's traditional classification in the catalogue to provide further access points to materials.

In addition to contributing content to Web-based applications, users are becoming increasingly empowered to develop applications of their own design. In his article on mashups, Eric Schnell describes these tools as hybrid applications created by linking third-party data sources into a new service. A particularly intriguing example of the library mashup is provided by Schell when he describes a project undertaken by Ann Arbor District Library. This project named "Go-Go-Google-Gadget!" utilizes Google gadgets in combination with information from the library's catalogue to create a variety of applications. These tools allow users to add catalogue functionality (such as viewing new books, requested materials, checked-out items) to their own personalized homepage or desktop and even develop their own library-oriented applications.

While this book is replete with Web 2.0 examples, some readers may find the often lengthy inventories of technologies as well as extensive in-article glossaries fatiguing. In some instances the volume seeks to cover too much ground, and, in doing so, provides too superficial a treatment of significant concepts and technologies. One example is the discussion of Digital Rights Management in Christopher Strauber's article on handheld computers. The author provides a paragraph that describes DRM as a means of ensuring that intellectual property is respected and briefly notes some of the challenges posed by the technology. Critics of DRM have argued that the technology may go well beyond protecting the legitimate rights of publishers and when coupled with robust anti-circumvention laws may potentially render laws protecting user rights a "paper tiger" (Armstrong 120).

Librarians new to the concepts of Web/Library 2.0 will find more than enough introductory material in this volume to aid them in developing a firmer grasp of what Web 2.0 is and how it is being used to improve library services. Those who already possess a more nuanced understanding of these concepts will find a rich resource in this book as it provides considerable analysis, numerous examples, best practices, and further readings on many of the most discussed Web 2.0 technologies.

References

Armstrong, Timothy. "Digital Rights Management and the Process of Fair USE."

Harvard Journal of Law & Technology 1.20(2006): 51 - 121. 18 March

2008 <http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=885371>

Alex Homanchuk, Reference & Web Services Librarian, a.homanchuk@uwinnipeg.ca, University of Winnipeg Library, University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, Manitoba