

Assignment 4, Option 1

Tumbling through Web 2.0

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In recent years, more and more libraries, both public and academic, have begun to implement Web 2.0 technologies and services. Web 2.0 is a term first used by Tim O'Reilly to describe Web-based technologies, such as social networking sites, blogs, RSS feeds and wikis, that are "meant to facilitate and coordinate massively produced knowledge and content"(Postigo, 2011). The increasing popularity of such social networking sites have combined with smartphone technologies to produce mobile apps of everyone's favorite sites, which enables them to keep in constant contact with friends, family, and entertainment. Web 2.0 provides an ideal platform for librarians to reach out to users both current and potential. Many libraries have begun to adopt some of the more popular websites, like Facebook and Twitter, for their patron outreach, but I feel that Tumblr is possibly best suited for the task.

Tumblr, created in 2007 by David Karp, may have millions of users, but it is less of a household name than Facebook or Blogger (Meltzer, 2010). Yet this is rapidly changing. The website itself has many features familiar to users of popular social networking sites, but Adrienne Matteson accurately describes it as being "the place where Blogger, Twitter, and Facebook meet" (Matteson, 2011). On Tumblr, you can like and "reblog" posts in much the same way that you like posts on Facebook or retweet your favorite tweets. Tumblr provides six methods of posting: text, photo, quote, link, chat, and video; the idea behind it is a fast-paced sharing of ideas and information, which can range from the serious to the downright hilarious. The posts from those you follow all appear on your "dashboard," and it is the ease of passing on posts by reblogging that helps to create Tumblr as a social networking site that enables immediate user participation.

Recently, there appears to be a growing trend of librarians using Tumblr for both personal and professional blogging, so much so that the term "Tumblarian" has been coined to refer to such users. Though I tried to find an official record of how many libraries are utilizing the site, I was only able to find

a list of sixty-eight libraries and three hundred and thirty-four librarians, provided by user Kate Tkacick, author of "Tumblrarian 101: Tumblr for Libraries and Librarians," an article featured on The Digital Shift website (<http://thelifeguardlibrarian.tumblr.com/tumblrarians>). Tkacick is an adamant Tumblr user and feels that the site can be a perfect free marketing tool for libraries. She advises librarians to engage their followers and to keep track of current trends in order to gain new followers. She states that the best library and librarian blogs find a balance between the professional and the personal, as "readers like to know the person behind the blog" (Tkacick, 2012). Tkacick also emphasizes the importance of tagging posts. Similar to the hashtag system on Twitter, tagging allows users to find your posts through Tumblr's search feature, and she suggests you "consider the broader themes" when tagging and not simply use those like #library or #librarians (Tkacick, 2012).

Like most social networking sites, Tumblr can have its advantages and disadvantages, but I feel that the positive features of the site outweigh any of the negative. To begin, the multiple post formats would allow for libraries to post a variety of content to attract patrons and followers. The photo feature—and the ability to create sets of photos in one post—could allow a library to advertise events, introduce their staff, or show off the newest titles added to the collection. Video posts, too, could be used for sharing recorded footage of events, but could also include vodcasts about library relevant topics or even movie trailers for the latest book to film adaptation; audio posts could be used in similar fashions, such as podcasts and author interviews.

The text-based posts, including the quote and the chat options, have the widest variety available. The text options could be used to update followers on events, library news, or even share moments that the posting librarian experiences throughout the workday. It has even been suggested that a microblogging platform like Tumblr could be used in combination with roaming reference services: "You could send multiple updates informing where in the building you are roaming at that moment and the types of activities you are witnessing; think of it like having library GPS" (DeVoe, 2009). The possibilities for

posts are almost endless.

Another feature that could prove useful to Tumblarians is the messaging capabilities on the website. Currently, Tumblr features the ability to submit questions through the ask feature, reply to posts, and send users fanmail. Asks can be answered publicly or privately and could be a great way to answer patrons' reference questions. Replies are applied directly on the post itself and can be seen by everyone, but they are a good way for users to respond to content and to get conversations started. Fanmail is a strictly private messaging feature that more closely resembles email and could be used for more personal interactions or user feedback.

One of the great things about Web 2.0 is that many of the various websites can be linked to each other, and Tumblr is no different. This feature enables librarians to update many different blogging or social networking sites all at once, from one location. Tumblr can be connected to Twitter and Facebook as well as other popular sites like Pinterest and Instagram. This allows users to use their preferred social networking platform to follow the library, and allows the library to minimize the amount of time spent updating those platforms. Tumblr also possesses the ability to be embedded into other websites, so it could be integrated directly into the library's main site.

One disadvantage to Tumblr is that it does make it difficult to hold extended conversations with users. While the site is great for encouraging interactions, if a real discussion gets going, the posts get increasingly longer and may clutter up the library's main blog. However, there is currently a browser add-on feature being developed outside of Tumblr, called Babbler, which would enable an instant messaging feature located on the user's dashboard. Should this addition be finished and perfected, it would alleviate this problem.

Tumblr also imposes a strict age limit of thirteen and older, which is important, as Tumblr, like most of the Internet, does contain mature and inappropriate content. For kids under 13 years old, Tumblr offers some great alternatives: "Ask your parents for an Xbox or try books" ("Terms of Service", 2012).

Of course, for the content of the library blog itself, this is easily avoided, as a user's blog contains strictly what they post. But if the library encourages patrons to join and follow them on Tumblr, the age limit and content warning would be an important piece of information for patrons and parents. Included in this warning could be information about another browser add-on known as Tumblr Savior, which allows users to block posts containing certain words and tags from appearing on their dashboards.

Web 2.0 is rapidly becoming an important and fun way for libraries to interact with their patrons. Sites such as Tumblr allow for a healthy variety in way information is passed between libraries and users and are a great way to build a sense of community. By implementing Web 2.0 platforms, libraries are able to reach out to their users and shamelessly self-promote the library as a way to gain more foot traffic and utilizing Tumblr may just be the best way to attract the most attention.

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