Get Real Stay Relevant

Internet Librarian International 2010, October, London

Like 50% of delegates who represented over thirty different countries, this was my first time to attend *Internet Librarian International.* The title of the conference *Get Real: Stay Relevant* is a useful reminder or wake-up-call – depending on where you are at – for all of us that we need to ensure our library services remain pertinent and cost effective.

On each of the two days of the conference, there was a keynote address. Robert Rowland Smith author of *Breakfast with Socrates* and writer of the weekly column *To be or not to be* in the *Sunday Times,* asked us to think about how we as information professionals view our profession philosophically. He suggested we think and categorise according to the group or groups we belong to and our personal experience and thus can never get to a universal understanding of anything. In a time where there is great emphasis on the now, it was interesting to hear someone stress the importance of valuing the richness of the past and having the ability to imagine the possibilities of the future.

"What we are not going to do is as important as what we are going to do," Dr. Hazel Hall said in her keynote presentation *Getting real about social media.* She presented an overview of trends and opportunities in social media, suggesting social media currently provide additional platforms for "traditional" information delivery and also offer much hidden potential, including personal professional development opportunities, knowledge management applications, and alternative research sources. *Social Media are not an alternative life, they are part of life.* In Hazel's view, there are five stages to Twitter acceptance: denial, presence, dumping, conversing, microblogging.

The daily programme was divided into three tracks thus offering the opportunity of selecting topics of particular interest to delegates. The three tracks on day one covered Looking Ahead to Value, Information Discovery and Resource Management. Day two focused on Going Social, Trending Information and The Techno Beat.

The need for evidence to continue what we are doing – a recurrent theme throughout the conference – was explored by Brian Kelly, UKOLN.[1] In *Monitoring and Maximising organisational impact* Brian explored a variety of tools for monitoring social media usage. This included **Summarizr** (a Twitter tool), **Twapperkeeper** (tweet archiving tool) and **Twittoaster** (an archive of tweets). He stressed that while mailing lists remain popular, we also need to

understand and use RSS, blogs and Twitter. In *Beyond Usage Stats* Joy Palmer suggested that understanding impact and value means rethinking performance. The key to proving your value is being central to the organisation. Palmer's presentation is available on Slideshare – www.slideshare.net and the useful JISC publication she referred to *The Guide to Researching Audiences* is also freely available on the web. Phil Bradley gave us a whistle-stop tour through a number of useful websites and tools in his presentation *What Phil has Found,* which is available in Slideshare and via Phil's excellent website www.netvibes.com/philbradley. One of the many sites he highlighted is screentoaster.com, a free online recording site which records tutorials, demos, training and other resources.

Karen Wallace spoke about Sheffield's initiatives in using social media. Their Twitter account (@Shefflibraries) is used to promote events, recommend books and announce important news. Through Flickr the public can access archival material including photographs documenting important regional events and pictures giving an insight into the daily work of the archive staff. For other projects including the Sheffield Children's Book Award and the Summer Reading Challenge, the use of blogs was explored.

Nancy Dowd (New Jersey State Library) explored mobile phones as a way of keeping in touch with users, who text the library to sign up for the messaging service. She suggested this method of marketing needs to be combined with other marketing tools including posters, bookmarks and postcards.

My main purpose in attending *Internet Librarian* was to give a presentation on an academic writing blog I have established and to talk about the potential of the blog as a tool to help librarians to publish. The blog is at http://academicwritinglibrarian.blogspot.com/.

This was a useful conference which was extremely well organised. In addition to the wealth of practical information in terms of social media tools and web resources which I learned about, I now feel I have a better understanding of how important social media is and will continue to be for libraries to thrive in a time where there is increasing need to show value for money and remain central to our organisations.

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1. United Kingdom Office for Library and Information Network