

web 2.0 and the digital library *or* learning from flickr

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abstract

Much of the Web has become more participatory, enabling users to provide content, context, and community. Digital library sites have not adapted to users' changes in behavior, and, as a result, are likely to seem less current and be less useful to people.

The photo sharing site **Flickr** <<http://flickr.com/>> is a particularly useful example of "Web 2.0" or the "read/write web" for libraries. Flickr uses many techniques to make the site more useful for its customers and to better insinuate itself into users lives.

Those techniques include: **tags** for fast, lightweight, user-driven metadata; **URLs** that are short, stable, human-readable, and predictable; **comments and notes** for users to discuss and elaborate upon photographs; **feeds** (RSS/Atom) to get information out of the site easily; and **an API** (or Application Programming Interface) to allow knowledgeable users to extend the site through their own programs and scripts.

While it isn't hard to imagine how an academic digital library collection could incorporate many of these ideas (**Scholr**, anyone?), academic libraries tend to lack important traits or resources that are present in a commercial venture like Flickr, including a **single-minded devotion** to improving the user experience, **programmers**, a **critical mass** of dedicated users, and sufficient **data on our users** and how they use our sites.

sites mentioned

Image Database to Enhance Asian Studies (IDEAS): <<http://ideas.nitle.org/>>

Creative Commons: <<http://creativecommons.org/>>

PennTags: <<http://tags.library.upenn.edu/>>

fastr: <<http://randomchaos.com/games/fastr/>>

Tagnautica: <<http://www.quasimondo.com/tagnautica.php>>

FlickrStorm: <<http://www.zoo-m.com/flickr-storm/>>

retrievr: <<http://labs.systemone.at/retrievr/>>

further reading

Crawford, Walt. "Library 2.0 and 'Library 2.0'." *Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large* 6, no. 2 (Midwinter 2006): 1-32. <http://citesandinsights.info/civ6i2.pdf> (accessed May 29, 2007).

A very useful summary of the "Library 2.0" discussions of late 2005 and early 2006, with considerable original commentary by Crawford.

Dempsey, Lorcan. "Stitching services into user environments - infrastructure." *Lorcan Dempsey's weblog*, December 9, 2004. <http://orweblog.oclc.org/archives/000505.html> (accessed May 30, 2007).

— — —. "The user interface that isn't." *Lorcan Dempsey's weblog*, May 15, 2005. <http://orweblog.oclc.org/archives/000667.html> (accessed May 30, 2007).

These two blog posts by Dempsey greatly affected my thinking about digital library interfaces, and what they lack in terms of integration to user's existing workflow and habits on the Web.

Farkas, Meredith G. *Social Software in Libraries: Building Collaboration, Communication, and Community Online*. Information Today, Inc., 2007.

I confess that I haven't actually seen this one yet, but did read pre-publication drafts of a few chapters. I expect it to be a great overview of "social software" like Flickr. (See also Stephens, below.)

Jastram, Iris. "Human-Assisted Computer Coolness - or - Computer-Assisted Human Coolness." *Pegasus Librarian*, May 3, 2007. <http://pegasuslibrarian.blogspot.com/2007/05/human-assisted-computer-coolness-or.html> (accessed May 30, 2007).

A write-up of a talk on research on the social web, with citations. Looking at how to motivate online communities in terms of tagging and the like.

Kroski, Ellyssa. "The Hive Mind: Folksonomies and User-Based Tagging ." *InfoTangle*, December 7, 2005. <http://infotangle.blogspot.com/2005/12/07/the-hive-mind-folksonomies-and-user-based-tagging/> (accessed May 29, 2007).

A good survey of tagging and folksonomies, with an extensive list of references.

Lawson, Steve, and Michael Porter. "flickr + libraries." *Online Programming for All Libraries: Archive*, March 6, 2007. <http://www.opal-online.org/archivelis.htm> (accessed May 30, 2007).

The current presentation doesn't have much to say about using Flickr in libraries, but this one that I did with Michael Porter for the Five Weeks to a Social Library online course covers that territory. (Scroll down, or "find in page" for "flickr.")

O'Reilly, Tim. "What Is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software." *O'Reilly*, September 30, 2005. <http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html> (accessed May 30, 2007).

If you are wondering what Web 2.0 is supposed to be all about, start here.

Porter, Joshua. "The Del.icio.us Lesson." *Bokardo*, May 2, 2006. <http://bokardo.com/archives/the-delicious-lesson/> (accessed May 29, 2007).

Drawing conclusions from user behavior on the social bookmarking site: "The one major idea behind the Del.icio.us Lesson is that personal value precedes network value. ...[E]ach person on the network needs to find value for themselves before they can contribute value to the network."

Salo, Dorothea. "Design Speaks ." *netConnect*, a supplement to *Library Journal*, October 15, 2006. <http://libraryjournal.com/article/CA6375469.html> (accessed May 30, 2007).

An excellent overview of the failings of much library design.

Shirky, Clay. "Ontology is Overrated -- Categories, Links, and Tags." *Clay Shirky's Internet Writings*, Spring 2005. http://www.shirky.com/writings/ontology_overrated.html (accessed May 29, 2007).

A very interesting overview of tagging and organization in a world where not everything has to go on the shelf in a certain order.

Spalding, Tim. "When tags work and when they don't: Amazon and LibraryThing." *Thingology (LibraryThing's ideas blog)*, February 20, 2007. <http://www.librarything.com/thingology/2007/02/when-tags-works-and-when-they-dont.php> (accessed May 29, 2007).

Why does LibraryThing have many times the number of tags as Amazon with much less traffic?

Stephens, Michael. "Web 2.0 & Libraries: Best Practices for Social Software." *Library Technology Reports*.42, no.4 (July/August 2006): 68p.

Covers social software from blogs and wikis to Flickr and the like. Accessible, with lots of ideas for library applications.

Tennant, Roy. "If It Doesn't Have an API, It's Not Worth Having." *TechEssence.Info*, December 13, 2006. <http://techessence.info/node/81> (accessed May 29, 2007).

Why the Application Programming Interface is important, and how to talk to vendors about it.

Weinberger, David. *Everything Is Miscellaneous: The Power of the New Digital Disorder*. Times Books, 2007.

A new book on the “three orders of order”: organizing the stuff itself, organizing information about stuff (in the form of index cards, etc.) and organizing bits.

image credits

Most of the images used in my presentation are Creative Commons licensed images from Flickr users.

“cloudythinking” by Flickr user joblesslibrarian
<http://flickr.com/photos/68149505@N00/374076098/>

“Rote Flora” by Flickr user aemkei
<http://flickr.com/photos/aemkei/238401109/>

“at least things seemed normal” by Flickr user gadjoboy
<http://flickr.com/photos/gadjoboy/265044816/>

Ranganathan trading card by Jessamyn West
<http://flickr.com/photos/iamthebestartist/66817517/>

“Ranganathan has a posse” by Aaron Schmidt, <http://walkingpaper.org/128>

“www.dirtydomains.com” by Laura Croton
<http://www.universes-in-universe.de/columna/col52/img/img-01-b.jpg>

“Earth Day Embrace” by Flickr user jurvetson
<http://flickr.com/photos/jurvetson/134466058/>

“grafitti NY” by Flickr user peterkellystudios
<http://flickr.com/photos/peterkellystudios/186867144/>

“garden of the gods VII” by Flickr user theparadigmshifter
<http://flickr.com/photos/theparadigmshifter/436729333/>

“Gateway, Garden of the Gods and Pikes Peak” photo by L.C. McClure, Denver, <http://memory.loc.gov> [no permalink]

“Fresh Well Water” by Flickr user Eileen Delhi
<http://flickr.com/photos/eileendelhi/46652648/>

“Arena Chapel Satan” uploaded by Rebecca Tucker
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/70979005@N00/103151479/>

“All-Night Coding with TabascoEye” by Flickr user phil_fry
http://flickr.com/photos/phil_fry/24491181/

“240 cobalt contacts: Flickr Tour 21” by Flickr user cobalt123
<http://flickr.com/photos/cobalt/47205258>

acknowledgements

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