

Sharing Knowledge, Creating Community

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NELINET IT Conference 2006
October 13, 2006 ~ Bentley College

The environment

- State library agency: administers grants, coordinates multi-type network, provides support and consultation services, continuing education, library advocacy, etc.
- 12 librarians with expertise in many areas
- Lots of information and resources

The challenge

OLIS Website serves as portal to our services (www.olis.ri.gov)

- How do we share all the other information we encounter on a daily basis?
- How do we store information and resources so they're quickly retrievable?
- How do we enable non-web team staff to contribute to collection of resources?

Concept: blog

- Content management system
- Search for information
- Categorize (tag) information
- Anyone can contribute information
(multiple authors, comments from readers)
- Web-based, don't need to know HTML, etc.
- Repurpose information, create feeds (RSS)

Selling the concept

- Convince web team of value of idea
(website mission clearly defined, blog would be a forum for additional resources)
- Develop proof of concept
(create blog on Blogger)
- Recruit contributors

Developing the framework

- Define purpose (content, audience):
Library news and information for RI librarians
- Draft writing guidelines
(allow analysis and commentary,
less formal than website)
- Create disclaimer

The name

- Brand service with catchy name to reflect audience/content; not “OLIS Blog”
- Culling information ... Rhodecull
- Rhode Island Librarian ... Rhodarian
- Tagline: Library news and information with a Rhode Island accent.
- Sssh! No one needs to know it's a blog

The Blogger experiment

- Slow, somewhat klunky interface
- No categories
- Atom feeds, not RSS
- Content and blog stored on external server
- External URL (rhodarian.blogspot.com)
- Blogger excellent for many blogs, but not for our purposes (needed substantial tweaking)

Wordpress

- Free web-publishing platform built on php and MySQL (<http://wordpress.org/>)
- Relatively easy to install
- Large user support community
- Highly configurable
- Content and templates on OLIS server
- Out of the box, did all things Blogger didn't

Refining the concept

- Developed more content
- Refined and formalized writing guidelines
- Developed comment guidelines
- Presented to administration
- Upon approval, invited staff to view and participate

Promoting Rhodarian

- Embedded RSS feed on OLIS homepage (use parser - customized version of Magpie; can use javascript, e.g. rss-to-javascript)
- Staff added link to email signature line
- Promoted at library events and continuing education classes
- Linked to Rhodarian articles on website
- Wrote about and linked to other blogs

Getting noticed

Three months later:

- Library Stuff write-up (“Suweeeeeet!”)
- Librarian.net
- Information Wants To Be Free
- Other state library blogs
- Who’s linking to your blog? Technorati

Signing up authors

- Created log-ins for web team members
- Recruited staff via email and at meetings
- One-on-one sessions with non web team: demo interface, show how to hyperlink, select category
- New version (2.0) much more user-friendly to non-technical people

Rhodarian community

- Comments enabled (MySpace discussion)
- Spam issues
- Internal contributors
- External contributors
- Requests to post items from community
- Feedback and conversations in the field

Keeping it fresh

- Post new content at least once a week, hopefully more often
- Content sources: listservs, email, blogs, local news media
- Get other people to write
- Post topics that engender discussion
- Explore new uses

Lessons learned

- Not everyone loves blogging
- Don't expect instant or total adoption
- Complement and integrate with existing resources
- Be prepared for spam; find anti-spam tools
- Update Wordpress regularly
- Persistence

Positive outcomes

- Empowered staff - any one, any where, any time
- Empowered community - ditto
- Expanded resources - in-house, community
- Repurpose content to other pages: L-TV
- Increase visibility and accessibility of OLIS staff
- Remove barriers between government and the libraries we serve

Feedback & comments

- Management requests write-up on blog for LSTA success stories, regional conferences
- It's great to see other state library associations are blogging!
~ Oklahoma State Library Association
- Wow! This blog is really neat. It makes me feel connected with the libraries of RI!
~ academic librarian, Newport

Conclusions

- Blogging is low cost (no cost) method to share information and increase currency
- No web-editing skills required
- Community can contribute to resource
- Blogging adds dynamic element to websites
- If you build it and promote it, they will come
- If you keep it fresh, they will stay

Questions?

Resources

- Office of Library and Information Services
<http://www.olis.ri.gov>
- Rhodarian:
<http://www.olis.ri.gov/rhodarian/>
- [Rhodarian Writing Guidelines](#)
- [Rhodarian Comment Guidelines](#)
- [Sharing Knowledge, Creating Community](#) (print)
- Karen Mellor: KarenM@olis.ri.gov

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OLIS Blogging Guidelines

The OLIS blogs are online journals consisting of short items on a single topic. Usually these posts are pointers to Internet articles on current trends, research, news, other blog posts, or to information resources.

Writing Guidelines:

- **Short and succinct.** This is the spirit of blogging, but make sure there's enough information to enable readers to understand the reason for the post. Provide a short sentence or two to give some indication of what the link is about, and perhaps why the link might be of interest to the defined audience for the blog.
- **Expound only as necessary.** Longer posts are certainly welcome and are sometimes insightful, but stay on topic. If you progress to another topic that is not integral to your current post, write a new post. As a general rule of web-writing, try not to stray beyond two screenfuls, as people probably won't read that much, no matter how brilliant your writing. We could go on and on about this, but you probably won't read much further if we do.
- **Respect copyright and the work of others.** Same rules of writing apply online as in print. If you think someone has written a brilliant summation, link to it, don't copy it. If you do copy more than a title or a phrase or two, credit it to the source. Though it's tempting to copy and paste, use your own words.
- **Add value.** The goal of this project is to add value to information by providing brief reviews and commentary on articles and information sources that you feel are relevant to the library community. Don't add to the information overload by posting common knowledge, old news, or mystery links that sound interesting, but you haven't explored.
- **Be professional.** While blogs are by nature commentaries, the OLIS name is attached to these blogs, and your first name will be attached to any post you contribute. If you wouldn't be comfortable putting your thoughts on a SIG or on paper, don't post them on the blog. Blogs are an email to the world.

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