

ONLINE LEARNING WEB 2.0 FROM STAFF TO PUBLIC -LESSONS LEARNED AND CHALLENGES FACED

L. BARRON

*Client Services and Collections, State Library of Queensland, Brisbane Queensland
linda.barron@slq.qld.gov.au*

ABSTRACT:

In 2009, the State Library of Queensland ran an on-line learning program for State Library of Queensland and public library staff that allowed participants to learn more about emerging technologies on the web. The 2009 staff program evolved from a State Library of New South Wales Learning 2.0 program – one of many adaptations of web 2.0 familiarisation programs that have appeared in recent years. The program was known as “Licence to Test Drive”.

In 2010, the Library designed and delivered a program for the Queensland public which is named “Looking @ 2.0”. “Looking @ 2.0” is an Online Public Access in Libraries funded project. The task of designing a program for the Queensland public was significant. While the staff program was focused on how library staff might incorporate web 2.0 technologies in their workplace, the focus of the public session is exposure to web 2.0 technologies which might be incorporated into people’s lives. The program provides participants with unbiased information to inform their decisions about use of web 2.0 technologies.

The assembly of a team with the diverse skills required was the initial challenge. Other challenges included: the identification of an appropriate platform, identifying appropriate pitch and pace for sessions, the level and form of learning support offered and the development of an appropriate marketing strategy. External challenges also needed to be considered – internet speed (especially in rural areas), participant privacy, and the unknown and unpredictable level of participation.

The paper outlines the lessons learned at the development stages of the project which now has modules available to enrolled participants. The sharing of pitfalls and issues associated with the implementation of the program is intended to assist with similar implementations in other workplaces.

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1. INTRODUCTION – LIBRARIES AND WEB 2.0

Web 2.0 technologies are impacting on people's personal, work and social lives. It is not unusual for politicians to use Twitter to announce policy, for musicians to release new music on My Space, for the next singing star to be found on YouTube or for astronauts to blog from space. "An eclectic mix of multi-media technology and social networking, blogs, Wikis, podcasts, RSS feeds, social software, broadband and megalithic search engines are changing the way people live – and learn." [1]. The internet and web 2.0 technologies are enabling users to interact with family, friends, work colleagues and like minded people like never before. Distance and time are no longer barriers. Blogs, Twitter, social networking sites and online games allow people to immerse themselves in the online world as and when they choose.

Web 2.0 technologies are continually being created. Those already in existence are frequently being improved and often add new features. Some people embrace these new technologies and are comfortable with self directed learning. These are the minority. Many people are unsure of the existence of web 2.0 technologies that may be useful to them. Negative publicity can create fear resulting in a reluctance to investigate technologies. Furthermore some who sign up are not aware of the precautions they can or should take to protect their privacy and prevent internet safety problems. With the dangers of the internet regularly making an appearance in the news and new technologies being developed regularly, how does the public analyse what technologies are right for them?

Traditionally libraries have been the keepers of resources where clients can access knowledge and trustworthy and authoritative information. What then is the argument for libraries to provide educational programs to the general public in the use of web 2.0 technologies? Quite simply, library staff know and understand web 2.0. It is libraries that that taken up experimenting with new ways of engaging clients using web 2.0 technologies. It is libraries who have taken on the role of providing free internet access to clients. It is libraries that are competing with new ways of finding information. It is a library's role to provide assistance to the general public in gaining competence in utilising technologies to enhance lifelong learning skills [2]. Furthermore libraries have a key role to play in developing the information literacy skills of their clients.

As the nature of information is changing, so might what it means to be information literate [3]. Information literacy and technology literacy are becoming intertwined. Previously information literacy has been defined with an explanation like the one provided by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals "Information literacy is knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner" [4]. As access to technology and the internet has improved, people's information literacy skills have not. Young people in particular do not spend time evaluating the relevance, accuracy and authority of the information they find online and they do not have the skills to develop effective search strategies [5]. Users need to be able to discriminate between good and poor information. Libraries can teach how information is created and communicated and encourage evaluation, deep thinking and reflection. One of the

important services a library of the future will offer will be programs that provide users with the skills and knowledge required to become information literate citizens.

2. MOVING FROM STAFF TO PUBLIC

Before library staff can implement training in web 2.0 for users they must be aware of these technologies and their capabilities. In 2009 the State Library introduced an online program about web 2.0 for State Library and public library staff. The aim of the program was to:

- create web 2.0 literate staff;
- demonstrate how other libraries were using web 2.0 technologies; and
- encourage participants to reflect on how they could implement technologies into their workplace or personal life.

The program, titled “Licence to Test Drive”, was an adaptation of a program that the State Library of New South Wales had offered to its staff. It was one of the many adaptations of Helen Blowers’ Learning 2.0 program from Charlotte and Mecklenburg County Library North Carolina. The first module involved participants setting up and registering a blog where they would blog about their learnings. Feedback from participants helped in the development of “Looking @ 2.0”.

The program for the Queensland public is a stand alone one which required research and development. As such, funding was needed to produce a high quality product. “Looking @ 2.0” is an Online Public Access in Libraries (OPAL) funded project. OPAL is a project-based program focusing on emerging technologies. Individual OPAL projects are approved on an annual basis. Feedback received from public libraries guides the approval process.

3. CHALLENGES AND PROCESSES

3.1. Project Team

The first challenge faced was to assemble the project team. The program was now client rather than library staff focussed which transferred the responsibility for the program. “Licence to Test Drive” was managed by staff from Public and Indigenous Library Services (P&ILS) program; “Looking @ 2.0” would be managed by the Client Learning Coordinator based in the Reference Services unit in Client Services and Collections program. It was important to have a member of P&ILS on the project team as their learnings from the staff program would prove invaluable. Team members were needed who had skills, knowledge or expertise in content, public library liaison, platforms and marketing. It was also identified that an additional team was needed to research the content. Two teams were set up - the project team and the development team. The project team consisted of the project manager, a representative from the development team, a staff member from Marketing and Communications, a member of the Web Services Team and a staff member from P&ILS. The development team consisted of seven staff who had been involved in some way with the design and development of “Licence to Test Drive”. Three of the project team were also on the development team. Five of the development team were from Reference Services and two from Public and Indigenous Library Services. Both teams had to do the required tasks for the project as part of their regular work duties.

A marketing person on the project team was beneficial as their ability to be able to develop name, branding and marketing collateral as well as their overall contribution to the team has been exceptional. Cross work unit collaboration has created stronger ‘bonds’ which foster and enable a collaborative work environment. The technical knowledge of the web services team member filled the knowledge gap of other members. Furthermore having two separate teams ensured the project team was manageable and the development team were able to work on the content side of the program.

The weakness of the team was that it did not include anyone with in-depth experience with the development of e-learning. Some members had a strong educational background, others an excellent knowledge of web 2.0 and others with web page design but no one possessed an e-learning background.

3.2. Environmental Scan

One of the first steps the project team undertook was to conduct an environmental scan to ascertain if other libraries had undertaken a similar program. Queensland libraries and two interstate libraries were contacted and asked about any web 2.0 programs they had conducted for clients. Many libraries had participated or run a program for staff but few had undertaken a program for the public.

The information gathered indicated:

- programs were undertaken on a small scale as funding to run the program was limited or non-existent;
- prizes did not encourage participation or completion;
- participation rate was linked to marketing budget;
- the most common prize offered was I-Pods; and
- some libraries did not keep records of the program development and outcomes.

The environmental scan was worthwhile conducting as learnings supported the assumptions the project team had already made about some aspects of the project.

3.3. Redevelop or Start Afresh

One of the important decisions that needed to be made was whether to modify the staff program or to create a new program. It was also identified by the project team that the use of a blog for the program was not practicable for the following reasons:

- participants would have to set up a blog and may not wish to do so;
- registered blogs had to be monitored for activity completion this would be time consuming; and
- blogs, unless made private, would be viewable by other participants.

Feedback from participants from the staff program included their concern with having to sign up for web 2.0 websites such as Facebook, Twitter and Flickr. This meant that many of the activities would not be able to be conducted.

The decision not to use a blog and specific website signups meant that the program would need to be developed from the beginning. This would give the State Library a unique product that could be shared with other libraries. The name "Looking @ 2.0" evolved from the change in the program design. Participants would now read information about various tools and look at how they are used without being required to sign up to become immersed in the tool. This now meant, of course, it would take longer to develop the program as research and development were necessary. With the decision to develop came the necessity to investigate a new platform on which to host the program.

3.4. Platform

After much discussion, it was agreed that the best way to present the program would be through a Learning Management System. Moodle was selected as this is a free open source system that is relatively easy to use. It was also identified that this could be a platform to develop online courses to deliver other learning programs statewide.

Although Moodle is relatively simple to use and there is a plethora of information available online through blogs, forums and websites, basic training for the developer was required. As software was no longer required to be purchased these funds were utilised for training. The developer attended a two day administrator and two day teacher course. This was highly beneficial and is highly recommended to anyone using this product as it saved time - self discovery/training was no longer required.

Moodle requires hosting on either an external or internal server. The decision was made to host Moodle internally as the cost associated with external hosting is high. Some testing was undertaken using Moodle to evaluate its performance. The project team agreed Moodle was the platform to use. Content was entering into Moodle by the developer. After all content was lost in a server crash, a critical oversight was identified – no one had provided detailed and adequate information to the ICT unit. This miscommunication was efficiently rectified and Moodle was reinstalled, albeit a few weeks later.

3.5. Content

The course is broken down into eight modules, each focusing on a theme. It was initially decided that the modules would be posted monthly. However, this would mean that it would take eight months to complete the course and up to nine months for prizes to be awarded and distributed. After discussion about participant motivation it was decided to post modules fortnightly. To encourage participation and completion prizes would be awarded for each module. Major prize draws would also happen at the completion of the program.

Selecting the module themes and content took a number of weeks and the development team took responsibility for this task. The most important criterion was that the technology selected had to be web 2.0 or link to web 2.0 in some way. The themes selected, with a short description, were:

- **Organise yourself** outlines Web 2.0 technologies that can be used to organise work and personal life. Includes Library Thing, Delicious and Big Tent;
- **Get it out there** explores spaces where participants can publish on the web. Blogs and wikis are the focus;
- **Listen, watch & mix it** explains podcasting, vodcasting and mashups;
- **Share your photos** explains where and how to store and edit photos online;
- **Keep up-to-date** investigates how participants can keep up-to-date with what's on, what's happening and when;
- **Talk and Connect** shows you how to connect with others through social networking. Includes MySpace, Facebook and Skype;
- **Play and be entertained** looks at online gaming, both free and subscription-based. The module will include helpful facts and information about online gaming; and
- **Get More and Explore** is a collection of the more unusual, interesting and quirky offerings available on the World Wide Web. Sometimes useful, some practical, generally amusing and always a great way to waste some time.

Each module provides participants with some background information, activities for further investigation aimed at developing understanding, a short quiz to test understanding, and a set of links

and resources to enable more exploration. Participants must complete a pre-survey, post-survey and quiz from a module to be eligible for the prize draw.

Caution was required in the selection of sites, particularly in the Play and Be Entertained Module. Participants are expected to be inexperienced internet users and may not be able to discriminate between web content and advertising. Sites were selected with the least possible advertising and a help sheet was developed that showed examples of advertisements. An information sheet will provide participants with examples of websites and will highlight the advertising material on the site.

3.6. Enrolments

Enrolments will open two weeks before the first course is due to start. The number of enrolments is the greatest unknown and hard to predict. At the time of writing this paper enrolments have not opened so it can not yet be reported on how successful the program was. However it can be reported that almost sixty public libraries have registered their support in either the promotion and/or support of the program. The email account set up to take queries has received several enthusiastic emails from people who 'can't wait' for the program to commence.

3.7. Support

The program is expected to attract people who have a very limited experience with web 2.0 technologies. Participants will also be from all around Queensland, and perhaps further. As it was expected that people will require assistance an email was set up for the duration of the program. Email communication would be responded to by the administrator of the program who has been appointed two days per week. On their non working days the Client Learning Coordinator would take responsibility for communication. The administrator will also conduct monthly drop in sessions in the training room. Participants would be invited to come in and ask questions about the program. There would also be a FAQs section on the website and linked to from Moodle.

As participants would be from all around the State we needed to address how to provide adequate support for those who were unable to visit the State Library. It was decided very early into the project that the public libraries were a great asset to this program. Expressions of interest documents were sent out to public libraries to see if any library or library service would be interested in participating, marketing and promoting and offering support to their participants. Libraries who participated were eligible for entry into two \$1,000 WOW Sight and Sound gift vouchers. To date 60 public libraries from around the state have registered their interest. Libraries intend to offer activities such as on site courses that complement the program and drop in sessions.

3.8. More

Along with the abovementioned challenges and processes other issues needed to be considered. These included prizes, pace and speed of the course and participant internet speed to name a few. Learning relating to these points can be provided to other libraries if requested.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

If you decide to run a program such as this, the following recommendations may be useful:

- Conduct an environmental scan to establish if there are programs already available that you can use. Check with others what their learnings were and if they have any recommendations. If they are prepared to share, ascertain what their budget was and how funds were allocated.

- If you run a program keep detailed records so others can learn from what you have done. Detailed records enable accurate reporting on progress.
- Seek funding so that there are adequate funds to market the program, purchase prizes, employ a developer and, if you choose, fund Moodle installation and hosting fees. Additionally an administrator for the duration of the program is recommended to handle queries, administration and prize draw and distribution.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate; develop a communication plan that identifies all internal and external stakeholders. Brief all relevant staff regularly and attend individual work unit staff meetings if you have the opportunity. Have regular project team meetings and document all actions required by members. Be specific with all stakeholders as to what their requirements are and due dates for any tasks. Regularly send email updates to stakeholders and participants.
- Select prizes based on what research indicates participants would use (our research indicated that participants are not interested in MP3 players but they love anything to do with wireless internet, laptops and digital photography). If funds permit have minor and major prize draws.
- During the development stage select web 2.0 websites and tools carefully. Consider your audience, not your own personal interests and passions. Research the safety or security issues associated with websites and tools and identify ways in which these can be articulated to participants in a constructive, not critical, way. Include a range of technologies and tools not just the tried and tested.
- When developing the content present information in an unbiased manner. Remember everyone's internet use is individual - what one person enjoys and finds useful others may not. Use a standard layout for each module. Take into consideration learning styles, literacy levels and skill level. Provide adequate information to allow the novice to participate. Instructions on how to view a video online is an example of a requirement for "Looking @ 2.0". Include multiple activities so those with low internet speed can still participate.
- Identify what level of support you are able to offer to participants. Can you gain assistance from other libraries to run the program jointly? Develop a FAQs page and add to this as you get queries not covered.
- When selecting the platform for hosting, consider your team's skill level and capabilities. Also take into consideration how will you protect the privacy of participants. You may need to allocate funds for the purchase of software.

The project team highly recommends that you 'have a go'. Enrol in "Looking @ 2.0", give it a try, be critical of the program, improve it and implement it for yourselves. We are very happy to share our learnings with any interested library.

CONCLUSION – WHERE TO NOW

This paper has provided a brief overview of some of the challenges and issues faced by the project and development team in the design and delivery of "Looking @ 2.0". As the program progresses we will learn more and look at ways in which to improve if we run it again. The program would not have been possible without the funding we received from OPAL. Thanks also to the many public libraries that gave their support to the program. We wish them luck for winning one of the prizes at the end of the year!

The next step is to undertake research with selected participants to see if participating in “Looking @ 2.0” has led to their engagement in web 2.0. This will commence at the end of the program and a research report will be compiled to report on findings.

Web 2.0 technologies are being used by libraries, library staff and the public. As more and more people become immersed in these technologies, the opportunities increase for library staff to provide unbiased and authoritative information to users. Furthermore as libraries we are testing and trialling ways of engaging with users using Web 2.0 technologies. “Looking @ 2.0” has demonstrated that the State Library of Queensland is a place where you can find out about Web 2.0.

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