

2009

Collaboration Matters

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Recommended Citation

Engard, Nicole C. (2009) "Collaboration Matters," *Collaborative Librarianship*: Vol. 1: Iss. 3, Article 6.

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.29087/2009.1.3.06>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/collaborativelibrarianship/vol1/iss3/6>

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Keywords

Collaboration, mashup, blogs

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Learning Together

During the last year I have been working with an amazing group of librarians/ writers on a book entitled Library Mashups: Exploring New Ways to Deliver Library Data [<http://mashups.web2learning.net>]. I mention this not as an advertisement (although it is nice to have some free advertising), but because it has been a fantastic collaborative learning experience for me.

Before starting the book, I knew what a “mashup” is (a web application that uses content from more than one source to create a single new service displayed in a single graphical interface) and had even seen a few examples from libraries, but I had no idea the power of mashups for libraries – or what they were doing with these amazing new tools until I started reading this book.

Everyone learns differently. I’m a visual learner mostly, but if an article, tutorial, or chapter is written clearly enough I can often follow the steps to create something similar of my own. In the case of Library Mashups, I was able to take tips from librarians worldwide and recreate my own mashups. These awesome applications made it possible for me to spend more time learning from others and less time maintaining my various different online profiles and websites.

Keeping up efficiently

In the previous issue I introduced you to RSS Aggregators as a way to learn from other librarians. I challenged you to find just twenty blogs or librarian news sites that will help you keep up with your career. So, what did you learn?

If you were watching my list of subscriptions [[www.web2learning.net/about-](http://www.web2learning.net/about-me/my-blogroll)

[me/my-blogroll](http://www.web2learning.net/about-me/my-blogroll)] you’ll notice that you were not alone in finding new resources; I, too, was subscribing and unsubscribing to various blogs and news sites.

Why unsubscribing? The concept of weeding is not limited to our physical library collections; we must also weed through the online resources we use for learning purposes. I often find that what was once useful to me no longer is, or I realize that several sites are all talking about the same exact tools. If you’re reading the same thing on three sites, then you’re not learning efficiently; unsubscribe from two and find two new resources to replace them.

Sharing what you learn

Collaboration is about more than working together simultaneously on the same projects, it’s about sharing your knowledge with others. Now that you’re learning from your colleagues, it’s time to pay it forward. With all of the tools on the social web why not help others like yourself?

The most obvious tool I can think of as a means of sharing information is a blog. There are many blogging platforms to choose from, so you need to do your homework. I always recommend starting with a free, hosted option like Wordpress.com [<http://wordpress.com>] (my preference) or Blogger [<http://blogger.com>] to start. Blogging is a great way to share knowledge with your colleagues; it’s also a great way to collaborate with fellow librarians. You can start a group blog in which you and other librarians take turns writing and sharing knowledge. I’ve also seen blogs used as communication devices on a library intranet: instead of sending emails to your entire staff, post it to a blog behind your firewall and allow everyone to comment.

While I'm a huge fan of blogging, I do know that it's not for everyone. Another way to share your knowledge with friends and colleagues is to set up a public, online bookmarking account. I use Delicious [<http://delicious.com>] for this. With my free online bookmarking account I can save the links to pages that I think might be handy to me or to my fellow librarians. I then publicize my account [<http://delicious.com/nengard>] on various social networking sites so that others can see what I'm bookmarking. Delicious is a great way for reference librarians to share their resources. Instead of each librarian having a collection of bookmarks on their personal computers, create a shared account so that your colleagues benefit from your knowledge. Consider opening the account to the public so that your patrons can see the resources that you like to use.

Another tool that has been in the news a lot is Twitter [<http://twitter.com>]. Twitter started out as a way for people to tell their friends about their day in 140 characters or less. It has since become a viable business and reference tool. Many libraries and librarians have signed up for Twitter to share information with colleagues, patrons, and friends. I have often used Twitter to ask a reference question of colleagues and have seen them do the same. If you're not into blogging (which requires quite a bit of writing) you might be better at micro-blogging, which is what Twitter is considered.

If you're not interested in starting something new (blogging, bookmarking, or micro-blogging) then make sure you share what you're doing already. If you have to write a report for your library about the uses of technology or a new library tool, share it online. Sites like SlideShare [<http://slideshare.net>] let you post your presentations (PowerPoint, Keynote, PDF, for example) and your documentations online as a benefit to others.. I always post my presentations on my own website for attendees to find at a later date, but I also submit a large number of them to SlideShare so that

people who might not have known about the topic can learn from me.

The Social Collaborative Web

We are living in amazing times! There isn't a day that goes by that I don't learn something new, and the librarian in me loves the fact that there are so many awesome tools out there that allow me to share my knowledge with friends, colleagues, and strangers. This is why I agreed to edit a book on "mashups" for libraries and why I had so very much fun working on it. I was able to learn from librarians from around the world and help them share their experiences and knowledge with so many others.

I hope that you'll be able to take at least one tool that I mentioned here and share your knowledge with someone; you'll be surprised both how rewarding it can be and how addicting you'll find it. Until next time, keep on learning, collaborating, and sharing!