

Chapter 6

Social Networking and the Promotion of Library Services: What Does the Future Hold?

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses how libraries can use social networking for upgrading the quality of their services. Social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, Wikis, Flickr, and Second Life are identified as the major sites that have the potential to enhance libraries' services. Through a review of recent literature, the use of these sites in libraries is discussed. The benefits of social networking services as well as the issues associated with its implementation in libraries are explored. This chapter also discusses what social networking and future movements really mean for libraries; a range of pathways are also provided for libraries wishing to implement the technology.

INTRODUCTION

Social networking (SN) is a new generation of on-line tool, application and approach; it is defined by Michael (2010) as the wide range of internet based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges or join online communities such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Delicious, Flickr, LinkedIn, and Live Journal. Boyd and Ellison (2007) also defined social networking sites as web based services that allow individuals to

1. Construct a public or semipublic profile within a bounded system,
2. Articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and
3. View and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

The rise of online SN is rooted in the emergence of Web 2.0. Web 2.0 was introduced by Tim O'Reilly in 2004 and can be defined as the social use of the Web which enables users to col-

laborate, create content, generate knowledge and share information online (Gabrela, 2009). The basic characteristics of web 2.0 as presented by Klempere (2006) and Anderson (2007) include:

- The user generated content, self/personal publishing and self expression;
- Collective intelligence or wisdom of crowds; information sharing;
- Network effect or chain effect; openness or working with open standards, using open sources, free data, re-using or remixing of data.

Due to the above characteristics of Web 2.0, many terms are commonly used by public and academics to describe the technology; these include; social networking services, online social media, virtual communities, e-communities, online communities, social networking software, collaborative software, etc (Van, 2009).

The evolution of SN began in the late 1990s, when websites that allowed users to create and upload content began to appear. The first recognizable social network site was SixDegrees.com which was launched in 1997. Weinreich was its founder, it allowed users to create profiles, list their Friends and surf the Friends' lists. SixDegrees was a tool that helped people to connect with and send messages to others and lasted for four years (Boyd *et al* 2007).

From 2000, onward, many other social networking sites such as Friendster, Hi5, Bebo, Orkut and so on were launched but they were not popular. By the late 2000, social networking sites such as Facebook, Myspace were launched and presently, they have gained wide spread acceptance by huge number of users.

SN can be categorized into two; Internal Social Networking (ISN) and External Social Networking (ESN). Suraweera, Razali, Couhan, Tamang, Hubilla, Ratnayake, Rubosa, Malik and Mahesar, (2010) defined ISN as a closed community that consists of a group of people within a company,

association, society or even an “invite only” group created by a user in an external social network. ESN on the other hand, involves an open community. In this case, membership is open to everyone irrespective of their profession, hobbies, beliefs, views, etc., as seen in Facebook, Twitter, Bebo, LinkedIn and so on.

These platforms enable users to upload their pictures, create their ‘profile’ and can even be “friends” with other users. In most of these social networking sites, both users must confirm that they are friends before they are linked. For example, if John lists Johnson as a friend, then Johnson would have to approve John’s friend request before they are listed as friends. On the other hand, some of these sites have a “favorites” feature that does not need approval from the other user. The sites usually have privacy controls that allow the user to choose who can view their profile or contact them. SN sites typically have a section dedicated to comments by friends. On Friendster, this section is called “Testimonials” while on Facebook, it is called “The Wall”. Other features of some of these sites include ability to create groups that share common interests or affiliations, upload or stream live videos and hold discussions in forums.

SN is widely used by individuals and groups of users, who have common interests and want to exchange information about their interesting topics and for business development. The popularity of social networking is indeed highly demonstrable by the number of people using the sites. According to the Nielsen Company 2010 statistics, people throughout the world spend a staggering 110 billion minutes on social network sites and 75% of all people visit the sites. Thus; it is safe to state that social network is a priority for the present generation. As these communication tools are increasingly attracting the attention of individuals of all ages, many organizations now consider the platforms as the best way to communicate with their employees, customers, stockholders and so on. Anunobi and Ogbona (2012) stated that the underlying motive of

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