Conclusion:

A Few Thoughts on the Findings ... and the Future

from
How to Effectively Use Social Networks

Social networks are so great
A wonderful place to meet and mate
But there are a few simple rules
To make them really an effective tool

Virtual communities are made of live people
Each one is different—they are not equal
So if you want a social network to embrace
Put details of your life right in their face

Place tons of information in your profile page
Your interests, hobbies, links, and books—not just your age!
Upload the videos and photos that you took
And pictures of yourself—so people know how you look

. . .

I said it before, and I'll repeat it here
The borders online are not always clear
I think it's a good thing, that on Flickr reside
Professional and personal pictures side by side

People like to connect with others who are open
If you allow them into your world, you will be well spoken
A rich profile is a sign that you're socially aware
So show them all of our faces, don't be scared!

Source: Dror Gill, "How to Effectively Use Social Networks" [song lyrics based on Blonde 2.0 blog post, Sept. 6, 2007], http://blog2song.blogspot.com/2007/09/how-to-effectively-use-social-networks.html.

"2015—The Web continues to evolve from a world ruled by mass media and mass audiences to one ruled by messy media and messy participation."

—Kevin Kelly, "We are the Web," in *Wired*, August 2005.

The Internet has come of age. It is not only the habitat of the digital natives who grew up with a mouse, a joystick, a laptop, a cell phone, texting and an iPod or two, but for all of us. We are the millions who log onto the Internet every day to do what has become routine–check our e-mail, get driving directions, find a recipe, browse a health care site, do our banking, book a flight, and of course, delete the annoying messages that found their way through our spam filters.

Web users have all become as experienced as digital natives. In the 18 months since the publication of the *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources* report, the use of search engines and e-mail has grown by more than 20% over what were already enormous participation levels. User participation in basic Internet services, such as searching and e-mailing, is approaching total participation. More than twice as many respondents are using blogs now as then.

The majority of the respondents are using online banking, purchasing goods on commercial Web sites and using instant messaging. Social Web sites have gone from obscurity to mass use in the last two years. Over a quarter of respondents (28%) use social networking sites. Five social spaces are in the Alexa top ten global Web sites, including MySpace, Wikipedia and YouTube. And, use of these social spaces is growing exponentially. YouTube had over 188 million visitors in June 2007, up over 280% in one year according to comScore.

Internet use has not simply increased, it has infiltrated our lives, offering more and more services at more and more service points. Use has grown for almost every Internet service we measured in this survey—well, almost every service.

The percentage of Internet users that have used a library Web site has decreased. Library Web site use declined from 30% of respondents in Canada, the U.K. and the U.S. in 2005 to 20% of the general public in these same countries in 2007, a 33% decrease.

Yet why should such a decline surprise us? It is to be expected that an online population equipped with do-it-yourself discovery tools will continue to expand their reach, as well as their desire to be self-sufficient, looking for information on their own in more and more places. Now experts themselves at search and find techniques, users naturally would move away from last-generation, "expert-based" information systems and gravitate to sites designed for them and by them, sites offering self service, quick access and limited rules. No authentication needed, no ILL forms to fill out, just free content and the tools to share it or create it.

The more intriguing question is—what are the services and incentives that online libraries could offer users to entice them to come back or to visit more often or even devote some of their own time to help create a social library site?

The survey results offer some clues.

Messy Participation

In Kevin Kelly's 2005 *Wired* article, "We are the Web," he paints a future vision of a powerful, universal Web. It is a Web of both technology and people, built not by the few chief architects who created the first generation Web, but a Web built by millions and empowered by the users—users who are now both creators and consumers.

Kelly's 2015 prediction of a user-empowered Web is probably much closer. Every day, tens of millions log on to MySpace, Facebook, Mixi and YouTube and they create. They create content, build profiles, upload videos, share photos—and then they erase their creations and start again. They build messy Web pages. They participate on others' sites. They share with their friends, they share with strangers—they lurk, they interlope and they engage. They create new communities and they join others. They socialize. Today's Internet can be characterized as unruly, close to Kelly's predicted world of "messy" participation.

The drive to participate, to build, to seek out communities is certainly nothing new. "Connect with friends," "be part of group," "have fun" and "express myself" are the top motives for using social networks according to our research. We could as easily be describing the motives behind the rise of the telephone, civic associations or, more recently, the cell phone, or the motivations that drew e-mail from the office into the home. The motives that are driving the rise of social networking are not unique.

And yet, this particular Internet innovation, the social networking craze, feels different. It doesn't seem to be playing out like the digital revolutions that preceded it. Social networking is doing something more than advancing communications between individuals, driving commerce or speeding connectivity. It is redefining roles, muddying the waters between audience and creator, rules and relationships, trust and security, private and public. And the roles are changing, not just for a few but for everyone, and every service, on the Web.

Whether one views this new social landscape as a great opportunity for improved information creation and exchange or as a messy playground to be tidied up to restore order, depends on one's point of view.

Privacy Windows

Users want privacy windows— permanent, impenetrable, but transparent and with the ability to open.

Our study offers a quick snapshot of life on the Internet, just a brief view from the sidelines of a scene that is playing out on millions of individual, but shared, playing fields. Our snapshot provides tens of thousands of unique attitudes, activities and motives, and, in aggregate, we saw a general public whose Internet activities, attitudes and motives were strikingly similar across the countries surveyed. Having shared common Internet services, tools, sites and protocols since the inception of the Web, Internet users have in many ways created a common online culture and community.

The builders of the social Web are comfortable and open. The Internet is now an everyday activity like making a phone call or watching TV. Internet activities are familiar and comfortable and, perhaps as a consequence, are not seen as particularly private. The users feel their personal information is as private and secure on the Internet as it was two years ago, and the more users participate on their favorite social and commercial sites, the more trust develops between the users and the sites.

Survey respondents told us that privacy absolutely matters. But more specifically they told us that what matters is the ability to be in control of their personal information. Users want, and expect, online services to have privacy and security policies. They want services to provide options that limit who can access their personal information, even if they usually choose not to use these options. And users want to know how their data will be used. They are often trusting of the people they communicate with online, and, they believe these social sites help build and maintain relationships.

They don't typically stop and read privacy policies, but they do look for symbols— identifiable marks that convey that the essentials of security and privacy are in place. Users want the freedom to safely share. They are not looking for privacy controls to serve as locked doors or barriers to their online activities. Rather, social Web users want privacy windows, shields of safety glass—permanent, impenetrable, but transparent and with the ability to open.

We observed a different perspective of the social Web from the 382 U.S. library directors we surveyed.

Library directors, like the general public surveyed, are active participants on the Web. In fact, on many services, they are even more active. Library directors have been online longer than the users they serve, and they e-mail, search, purchase online and build Web sites at rates greater than the general public.

But, unlike the general population, library directors see the Internet as a much less carefree environment. They feel their personal information is kept less private on the Internet than it was two years ago. While their personal information was breached at the same rate as the general public, they perceive their personal information on the Internet as less secure. And they predict the public share their same level of concern.

U.S. library directors do not see many everyday activities, such as home e-mail, search engine use and cable TV, as more private than the general public, with one exception. Library directors view the privacy of library activities as substantially more private than the general population does. And the directors feel users share their views. In fact, they anticipated that users would provide even higher privacy ratings than they personally provided for library activities.

These strong privacy concerns were reflected in their online behaviors on social sites. Library directors share less personal information than the general public. While equally willing to provide basic contact information on commercial sites, library directors are less willing to share information about themselves (e.g., personality or physical attributes, photos or videos or marital status) on social sites.

We see a social Web developing in an environment where users and librarians have dissimilar, perhaps conflicting, views on sharing and privacy. There is an imbalance. Librarians view their role as protectors of privacy; it is their professional obligation. They believe their users expect this of them. Users want privacy protection, but not for all services. They want the ability to control the protection, but not at the expense of participation.

A minority of users view library services and books they have read as very private—less than a quarter of respondents. It may be that for most of the population surveyed, books are not perceived as confidential, but, in fact, public. Books are everywhere—in airports, in grocery stores, at Wal-Mart, and of course, online. Over 50% of users surveyed have visited an online bookstore in the last 12 months. They rate the privacy of their activities at bookstores and on online bookstores roughly equal to the library—not very private.

Libraries = Books

Libraries equal books, both offline and online. Our survey respondents told us this in OCLC's 2005 *Perceptions* study. Brand drives expectations. It drives expectations for the users/customers of the brand and it drives expectations for the builders of the brand. Brand creates an important and useful set of expectations of what the organization should deliver, and conversely, brand often puts boundaries around what users believe an organization can deliver.

Users and librarians have dissimilar, perhaps conflicting, views on sharing and privacy.

The library brand has put boundaries around the expectations of libraries on the social Web. Overwhelmingly, neither the general public nor librarians see a role for libraries as providers of social sites.

Offline, libraries are vibrant social spaces. They are hubs of community activities and provide a venue for open exchange and dialogue. Yet, neither users nor librarians can see such a role for libraries online. Less than 15% of the users, or library directors, think libraries should construct or sponsor social networking sites. An equally small percentage of users say they would be very likely to contribute content, view others' collections or become involved in a social site if one was provided by a library.

Of the roughly 15% of both general public and library directors who saw a role for their libraries in social networking, the top suggestion for services their libraries should provide was predictable—"book clubs."

The Socially Networked Library

"Before long, I don't think people will use the term "social network." It will just become ubiquitous. People will expect it wherever they go online.

—Brian Mathews

It is unlikely that online book clubs alone will be the enticement to draw the builders of the social Web back to libraries or to libraries' Web sites. If Mathews is correct, and the survey results suggest that he likely will be, users will not be looking at the Web or the services they use as "social sites"; the distinction will be gone. Such labels will no longer differentiate Web sites. And it is probably no longer important if MySpace or Facebook or YouTube holds a position in the top 10 most used Web sites (except for the owners and financiers of the sites). It probably will not be important or interesting because the social Web will simply become our Web. Today's messy rules of participation will simply become the mode of operation, the expectation for all world-class Internet services. To entice users to the online library, libraries must expand their social activities, allowing users to easily share and create content and collaborate with others. They must build a high-value presence on the Web, a strong enough brand to compete.

As the Comparative Timeline in Appendix F chronicles, librarians have pioneered many of the digital services we now see in broad use on the Web: intranets to share resources, electronic information databases and "ask-an-expert" services. And although it took some librarians awhile to embrace the use of search engines as hubs for information access, librarians are now Googling more frequently than their users and teaching users how to maximize the potential of this powerful tool.

But, unfortunately, librarians are not pioneering the social Web. Whether it is a privacy concern, a lack of resources or the expectations of their users, librarians are lagging, not leading. Even when it comes to the social networking activity most easily associated with the library—book clubs—the digital pioneers are being out-innovated. As of September 2007, MySpace reports 197 online groups with "book

club" in the title. And, book-swapping Web sites are becoming increasingly popular. Sites such as Paperback Swap, Book Mooch and Read It Swap It allow users to register and share books with other users, socializing a service that libraries have traditionally provided.

Many U.S. library directors are simply not engaged in the socialization of the Web. In the U.S., 37% of Web users surveyed are participating on social networks, and, across the countries surveyed, 56% of college students now use social networking. Yet, less than a quarter of U.S. library directors are engaged on social networking sites.

Increasing staff engagement on social sites should be included in every library's strategic plan.

To engage library users on social sites, our findings suggest that librarians will not only have to participate more, but they will also have to challenge the traditional approaches to protecting users' information privacy. Since the early 1900s (see Appendix F), U.S. librarians have been privacy pioneers, ensuring that users have freedom of thought. Now, librarians must identify how best to continue to defend privacy, while adapting the traditional privacy principles to the open world. Must information privacy protection remain the sole responsibility of the library, or can users become involved? Is it possible to give the users privacy controls alongside the libraries' privacy rules?

We know that privacy is important to users, and to librarians, but we also know that sharing and open access matter. Privacy matters, but sharing matters more. If the axiom "convenience trumps quality" was the trade-off that gave rise to the search portals as providers of "good enough" information, it might be said of the social Web that "sharing trumps privacy."

But is a trade-off required? Are there methods of providing both sharing and privacy? Is it possible for libraries to pioneer social solutions? Banks provide an interesting case study.

Of the 18 everyday activities that we evaluated, online banking was the single activity that respondents, both the general public and librarians, rated as very private. Across all countries surveyed, online banking was seen as very private by over 60% of users. Online banking has become one of the most widely used online services. Over half of respondents indicated that they have used an online banking site in the last year.

Banks have successfully migrated the privacy and security promise of their physical institutions to their online institutions. Without compromising privacy, banks have increased self-service, established user control and created 24 x 7 service and access. The transition has not been without work. Online banks have done many things to not only build their solutions but to communicate their value and their brand promise. Online banking sites offer both written privacy policies and privacy symbols, or icons, to convey their privacy and security promise. Banks regularly communicate their online security policies with written direct marketing materials. They market privacy in their physical locations, on their banking kiosks and on their bankcards.

"Convenience trumps quality."
                    −2005

"Sharing trumps privacy."
                    −2007

Libraries have a similarly high institution trust level. Sixty percent (60%) of survey participants rate their libraries as trustworthy. To date, libraries have been unsuccessful transferring this brand promise online. Online libraries are seen as no more private than commercial sites and social sites. Many users (24%) are not aware that libraries have policies on how their personal information is used.

Most physical libraries have no visual signs or symbols that promote a privacy promise to users, even though over 45% of library directors indicated that it was their professional responsibility to protect users' privacy. Similarly, most library Web sites do not have any visual symbols, or icons, to promote the promise of privacy and security. Does your library card carry a promise of privacy? (The author's library card carries a warning about responsibility for lost items, but no brand promise.)

On the social Web, is it possible to make library privacy a differentiator—a brand promise—not a barrier to access or information sharing?

If convenience does trump quality, then it is the librarians' job to make quality convenient. If sharing will trump privacy on the social Web, it is the librarians' opportunity to make privacy shareable.

Open the Doors

On the social Web, the library brand must go from institutional to personal.

For example, many libraries have initiated broadcast services on their Web sites; RSS feeds and blogs are among the most common. No doubt, these are useful services. But if our goal is to create a social library, focusing on these broadcast services is likely leading us in the wrong direction—perpetuating the traditional concept (brand) of the library as a supplier of information, an institution, not a place for idea generation and exchange. Some very simple techniques are creating a personal brand promise for online commercial sites. A quarter of survey respondents told us they establish a "my favorites or wish list" on commercial sites. No such service exists on most library sites. While this simple application is no doubt a relatively useful service for consumers, it is an invaluable brand endorsement for the vendor. It creates a partnership into the future, a sense of joint ownership of the Web experience and provides users with a personal reason to return. By inviting participation, the connection between the customer and the supplier, or the user and the library, changes. And so do the perceptions.

Our perceptions become our realities, and often, our limitations.

Our perceptions become our realities, and often, also our limitations. This was clearly the case for the authors of this report when we began our research on social networks a year ago. There is no doubt that our initial perceptions of social networks influenced our approach to this study. Handicapped by only limited personal experiences with sites, we began our study as we had every study before it—by looking at social networks as a service or set of services to be studied, learned and implemented. We conceived of a social library as a library of traditional services enhanced by a set of social tools—wikis, blogs, mashups and podcasts. Integrated

services, of course, user-friendly for sure and offering superior self-service. We were wrong.

Our view, after living with the data, struggling with the findings, listening to experts and creating our own social spaces, is quite different. Becoming engaged in the social Web is not about learning new services or mastering new technologies. To create a checklist of social tools for librarians to learn or to generate a "top ten" list of services to implement on the current library Web site would be shortsighted. Such lists exist. Resist the urge to use them.

The social Web is not being built by augmenting traditional Web sites with new tools. And a social library will not be created by implementing a list of social software features on our current sites. The social Web is being created by opening the doors to the production of the Web, dismantling the current structures and inviting users in to create their content and establish new rules.

Open the library doors, invite mass participation by users and relax the rules of privacy. It will be messy. The rules of the new social Web are messy. The rules of the new social library will be equally messy. But mass participation and a little chaos often create the most exciting venues for collaboration, creativity, community building—and transformation. It is right on mission.

Our pioneers in "Beyond the Numbers" indicated that they started with a small step into the social world, by blogging, chatting or contributing to wikis—by participating. And discussing what they learned. We want to hear your perspectives and ideas. Share your comments at www.oclc.org/reports/sharing/.

The new Web is a very different thing. Libraries need to be very different, too.

Invite users in to create content and establish new rules.