

## Library 2.0: A Summary of What's Been Said So Far

There has been much buzz recently in library circles over the phenomenon known as "Library 2.0." If the term is new to you, don't feel like you've been left behind. Library 2.0 has only been around since September 2005. Michael Casey, branch manager of the Dacula Branch of the Gwinnett County Public Library, coined the phrase on his blog LibraryCrunch in October 2005.<sup>1</sup> The concept of Library 2.0 gained widespread attention at the Internet Librarian conference in October 2005. There David King, librarian with the Kansas City Public Library, and others presented the concept of Library 2.0 and challenged libraries to begin to move towards being the type of libraries defined by the phrase. Since that time there has been a flurry of discussion in the blogosphere attempting to define Library 2.0 and evaluate the movement. Because much of the discussion has so far been done in the world of blogs, discerning an agreed upon definition of Library 2.0 is no easy task. As far as I can tell three papers have been published so far that address the subject. The sources used for this summary review are these three papers as well as a smattering of blog discussion. My goal is to distill what's been said so far into a coherent definition.

Before examining what's been said about Library 2.0, it will be helpful to briefly discuss a related phenomenon, Web 2.0. Library 2.0 takes its name from Web 2.0. This is because intrinsic to Library 2.0 is the use of Web 2.0 technology. So what is Web 2.0? Tim O'Reilly in a seminal paper identifies several characteristics of Web 2.0.<sup>2</sup> The first is the use of the web as a platform. As we shall see, this is also an important part of Library 2.0. The use of the web as a platform can be best understood by contrasting Netscape and Google. The former was an application designed to run on a user's machine while the latter is accessible from anywhere and is constantly being updated without having to go through the frustrating process of releasing new versions. Another characteristic of Web 2.0 is the harnessing of collective intelligence. One well-known use of this principle is open-source programming which allows any user to improve an application. Such technology has produced Firefox and the Apache software used by Amazon's website. More recent examples of collective intelligence are Wikipedia, the massive internet encyclopedia that allows any user to add information, and del.icio.us where users can create tags for websites and share their lists of favorites. Blogging is another widespread use of collective intelligence. One final aspect of Web 2.0 pertinent to Library 2.0 is rich user experiences. Web-based applications finally are providing a user interface with the richness of local PC-based applications.

Following the release of this article, O'Reilly issued a more succinct definition of Web 2.0. I include it here because it is a useful summary of the movement, and because it is quoted in a Talis paper titled "Web 2.0: Building the New Library", one of the earliest examples of the Library 2.0 proposal. O'Reilly states that

Web 2.0 is the network as platform, spanning all connected devices; Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.librarycrunch.com/2005/09/librarians\\_without\\_borders.html](http://www.librarycrunch.com/2005/09/librarians_without_borders.html). This is the earliest blog entry I found on his website that contained "Library 2.0." The date for it is 9/26/2005. Wikipedia reports that the term originated with Michael Casey.

<sup>2</sup> "What Is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software," 9/30/2005, <http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html>. I choose to rely upon this source for information about Web 2.0 because several proponents of Library 2.0 point to this as a source. Wikipedia also has a link to this article.

software as a continually-updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an "architecture of participation," and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences.<sup>3</sup>

More comment from this Talis paper will serve as an entry point into the Library 2.0 discussion. Essentially what Talis proposes is the use of this Web 2.0 technology for the library. Paul Miller, technology evangelist with Talis, pictures traditional libraries as collections of disconnected silos of information. Web 2.0 technology offers the possibility of connecting the library's components to one another as well as to other services beyond the library building in order to greatly enhance the library's services to its patrons. Implicit in the Talis article is a fear of what will happen to the library in the world of Google and Amazon. With such services readily available to anyone with an internet connection, will the library become obsolete? Talis implies that the answer to this question is yes, unless, the library radically retools itself, making use of Web 2.0 technologies. According to Talis, libraries must push their "content, services, and expertise" to places where a library has not traditionally been considered the source of support for users.

Talis followed up this paper with another one in November 2005 that more specifically outlined the perceived threat and the proposed response.<sup>4</sup> For Talis, Library 2.0 is a must. Libraries have two options: become 2.0 or become irrelevant. Due to the reality of Amazon and Google, Talis asserts that many libraries today serve "an ageing and diminishing segment of society. They are faded, shabby: a home for musty books." If libraries must pursue 2.0 status, what is Library 2.0? Talis defines it as "a concept of a very different library service that operates according to the expectations of today's library users. In this vision, the library makes information available wherever and whenever the user requires it." Thus Library 2.0 is a philosophy of service something like Burger King – you can have it your way. However, to clarify, Talis sees this service philosophy as intrinsically tied to Web 2.0 technology. Using Web 2.0 technology, the library can once again regain its status as the leading information provider. One proposal that is now possible due to the advent of Library 2.0 is the creation of a single, global, and free card catalogue. This card catalogue could even be integrated into other websites like Amazon, giving customers the option to check out a book from the local library rather than purchasing it. To summarize, Talis says that the principles of Library 2.0 are 1) The library is everywhere; 2) The library has no barriers; 3) The library invites participation; and 4) The library uses flexible, best-of-breed systems.

Walt Crawford, a library professional with more than three decades of experience, provided the most comprehensive summary of the Library 2.0 discussion through January 2006. The article titled "Library 2.0 and 'Library 2.0'" was intended to be a five to ten page outline of the Library 2.0 phenomenon, but ended up as a thirty-two page collection of quotes interspersed with commentary.<sup>5</sup> Crawford compiles sixty-two views and seven definitions of Library 2.0, drawn primarily from the blog world and personal correspondence with those involved in the discussion. Key to Crawford's argument is his distinction between Library 2.0 and "Library 2.0."

<sup>3</sup> Paul Miller, *Ariadne*, 45 (October 2005). <http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issues45/miller/>.

<sup>4</sup> Ken Chad and Paul Miller, "Do libraries matter?: The rise of Library 2.0," [http://www.talis.com/downloads/white\\_papers/DoLibrariesMatter.pdf](http://www.talis.com/downloads/white_papers/DoLibrariesMatter.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Walt Crawford, "Library 2.0 and 'Library 2.0,'" *Cites and Insights* (Midwinter 2006), 6:2; <http://cites.boisestate.edu/civ6i2.pdf>.

The former is merely a part of the gradual evolution of the library over time to meet the changing needs of its patrons, while the latter is the bandwagon that has been much talked about in the blogosphere. Another of Crawford's insights is that one's take on Library 2.0 is largely a function of one's definition of the library. Crawford, disagreeing with Talis, states that public libraries have never been

most people's primary source of current information, or indeed the first place you'd go looking for information in general. I don't believe such a role is feasible or sensible (even as libraries *do* play important roles as providers of specialized and secondary information and as safety nets for those whose other information resources are impoverished).

Crawford's overall assessment is that "Library 2.0" the bandwagon is necessarily confrontational and possibly detracts from the appropriation of new tools by libraries (2). On the other hand, considering Library 2.0, he states,

Some (probably most) of today's most innovative librarians see these new initiatives within the broader framework of successful existing services, and see the desirability of attracting new users within the framework of retaining the users who *love* what libraries currently do. I have no argument with these innovators. I wish them nothing but the best, and look forward to reading of their successes. In my opinion, their initiatives will be evolutionary, not revolutionary. I don't believe most American public libraries either require or would benefit from a revolution. (3)

From my own research focusing primarily on the three above papers and a handful of blogs, I think that I can discern at least two definitions of Library 2.0 one broader and one more narrow. The narrower understanding identifies Library 2.0 as the appropriation of Web 2.0 technology by the library. The broader definition of the movement is as a service philosophy. The library should serve the needs of its community. As the needs of the community change, the library must change accordingly. However, those who define Library 2.0 as a service philosophy are quick to note that Web 2.0 technology is driving the changes that are occurring. Sarah Houghton has produced what some have called the "standard" definition of Library 2.0. Her words fit within the broader definition. I include it here because a summary of the Library 2.0 would be incomplete without it. She says that

Library 2.0 simply means making your library's space (virtual and physical) more interactive, collaborative, and driven by community needs. Examples of where to start include blogs, gaming nights for teens, and collaborative photo sites. The basic drive is to get people back into the library by making the library relevant to what they want and need in their daily lives...to make the library a destination and not an afterthought.<sup>6</sup>

Some real examples of Library 2.0 are beginning to emerge. David King, a librarian with the Kansas City Public Library, suggests that libraries allow users to create original content rather than merely serving as "information silos," and that libraries offer new services like chat, IM, game nights, and web access. In addition, he notes the potential uses of IM, chat, and

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted by John Blyberg in "11 Reasons why Library 2.0 Exists and Matters," 1/9/06, <http://www.blyberg.net/2006/01/09/11-reasons-why-library-20-exists-and-matters>.

podcasting for reference purposes.<sup>7</sup> Jenny Levine points out that most libraries make the fundamental mistake of assuming that the OPAC has to be a part of the ILS.<sup>8</sup> Some new features for the OPAC have been suggested by Casey Bisson and Bisson has built a prototype OPAC to prove his point. Every record has its own page (permalink) that can be indexed by search engines like Yahoo and Google. Blogging software is available that allows users to leave comments, trackbacks, and tags. The OPAC uses WordPress, open-source software that enables anyone to adjust features such as the content and the display of search results. This would open the doorway for potentially thousands of helpers to improve the OPAC. Similar to Amazon's site, Bisson's OPAC has a recent searches sidebar, a book jacket display, and the ability to search inside the book.<sup>9</sup> John Blyberg has begun to make some of these innovations at the Ann Arbor District Library. Users can now build personal card catalogs with their library accounts and add comments to the card system that are viewable by other users.<sup>10</sup> In only two weeks, patrons added over six hundred comments and fifty users began building personal card catalogs. North Carolina State University has recently released a new version of their online catalogue that makes use of some of these concepts as well, although it doesn't go as far as Bisson's prototype.<sup>11</sup> Library 2.0 advocates point to these developments as essential to the library of the future, and note that the possibilities for further change are endless as library patrons begin to play a part in the formation of the library.

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<sup>7</sup> David King, "Why Library 2.0?" 12/8/05, <http://daweed.blogspot.com/2005/12/why-library-20.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Jenny Levine, "Library 2.0 in the real world," 1/30/06, <http://www.techsource.ala.org/blog/2006/01/library-20-in-the-real-world.html>.

<sup>9</sup> To see several screen shots of Bisson's OPAC go to <http://www.flickr.com/photos/maisonbisson/archives/date-posted/2006/01/20>. It looks very similar to an Amazon or Google page.

<sup>10</sup> John Blyberg, "2006: Year of the phoenix OPAC?" 2/8/06, <http://www.blyberg.net/2006/02/08/2006-year-of-the-phoenix-opac/>.

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/catalog/>.