

“Web 2.0”

A chapter from

**The Academic Library and
the Net Gen Student**

by Susan Gibbons



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Web 2.0

ONLINE GAMES ARE NOT THE ONLY ROUTE TO AN engaging experience on the Net. The rest of the Web is rapidly catching up.

The Web has never been a purely static experience, but it has not been all that interactive either. With the vast majority of web pages, when a user arrives at the page of HTML code, displayed through an Internet browser, there is usually little more than text to be read and images to be viewed. Movement through the website is accomplished through user-initiated mouse clicks, to which the web server responds with a repeatable, usually predictable, response. The delivery of content is predominantly a one-way conversation, with the website, as proxy for its author, the speaker and the web surfer the listener. A productive experience with the Web requires the user to be able to locate and pull the appropriate web pages out of the vast sea of possible websites. This is the familiar world of Web 1.0 to which the majority of us have grown accustomed.

The concept of Web 2.0 promises to be very different. Tim O'Reilly, founder and CEO of O'Reilly Media, is credited with coining the term "Web 2.0" in 2004. Although there is certainly no consensus about what Web 2.0 fully entails, there are some shared principles, which were presented by O'Reilly in 2005 and are captured in figure 4-1. The first is the concept of "the Web as platform." In the Web 1.0 world, a website with its static text and images is the deliverable. In the 2.0 world, however, the Web is just the platform or foundation, which supports the delivery of myriad dynamic services.

O'Reilly (2005) uses Google to demonstrate the concept of the Web as platform:

Google's service is not a server—though it is delivered by a massive collection of internet servers—nor a browser—though it is experienced by the user

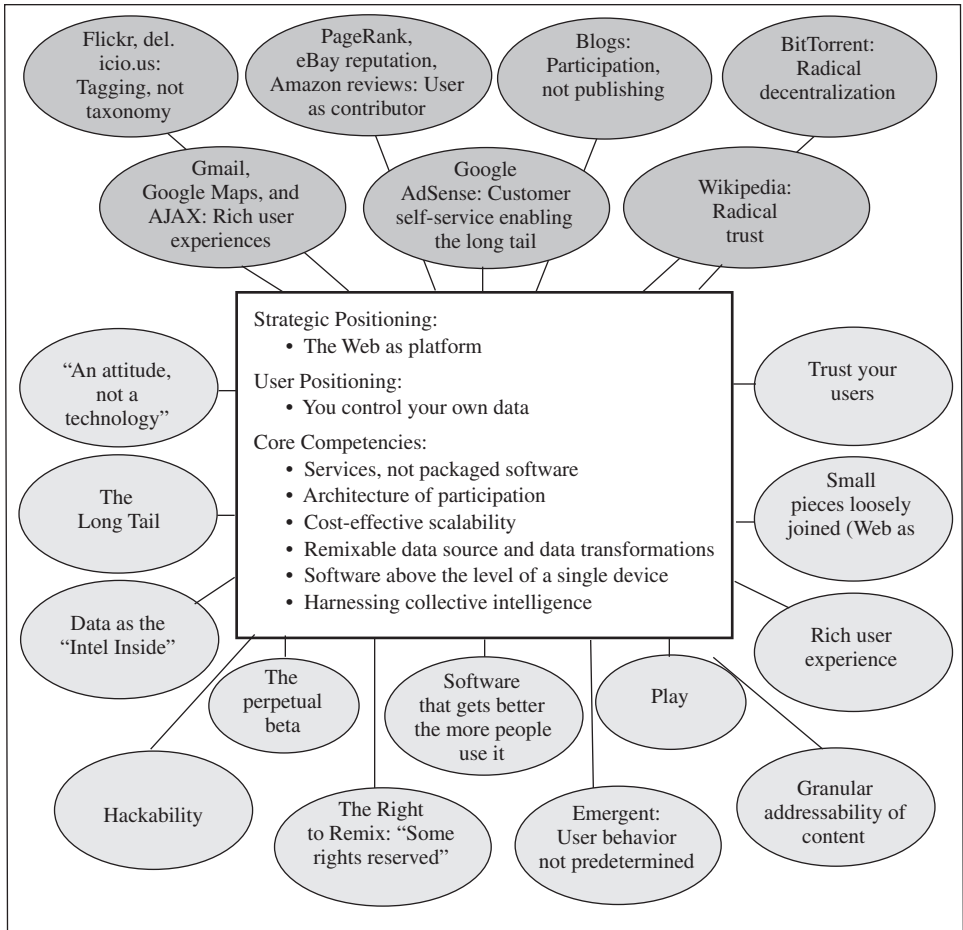


FIGURE 4-1

Web 2.0 meme map. Originally published in Tim O’Reilly’s “What Is Web 2.0” (<http://tim.oreilly.com/news/2005/09/30what-is-web-20.html>)

within the browser. Nor does its flagship search service even host the content it enables users to find. . . . Google happens in the space between browser and search engine and destination content server, as an enabler or middleman between the user and his or her online experience.

The Web has become a computing platform that can deliver a dizzying array of services through little more than a web browser, thereby eliminating the need for the end user to install special software on her own personal computer. As

Google makes incremental changes to its product, we never have to download or install new releases. Rather, the web platform hosts these product changes on our behalf.

The second principle of Web 2.0 is the “harnessing of collective intelligence.” In the 1.0 world, when a user arrives and engages a website, that interaction has little consequence for the website, except to add another hit to the usage statistics. With Web 2.0 products, it is the user’s engagement with the website that literally drives it. Amazon.com is an excellent example of this. Each time you visit Amazon.com, you leave behind a virtual pile of useful data. The search terms you use, the sequence of books you examine, the reviews you read and write, and ultimately the books you buy are collected and combined with similar data from other users to form an enormous body of information about user behavior. Buried within are discernable patterns, which, once recognized, can be leveraged and turned into new and improved features. For example, Amazon.com is using this immense collection of past usage data to create the features “Customers who bought this item also bought . . .” and “What do customers ultimately buy after viewing items like this?” which are marvelous recommender systems that no one person alone could create.

Digg (digg.com) is another example of a website harnessing the collective intelligence of its users. Digg users submit links to news stories they have found interesting. As explained on the website, “After you submit content, other digg users read your submission and digg [vote for] what they like best. If your story rocks and receives enough diggs, it is promoted to the front page for the millions of digg visitors to see.” The result is a news outlet where the community of users, not an elite group of individuals, act as the editors.

The third Web 2.0 principle is the primacy of data and the databases that house it. At the core of Google’s service is an immense database of metadata for billions of web pages. A database of available books is at the core of Amazon .com; MapQuest (www.mapquest.com) rests on a database of maps. The successful firms of Web 2.0 are those that not only have the best data but also know how to harness it well. For example, although the book data Amazon .com controls is quite similar to that within a library catalog and Bowker’s *Books in Print*, the presentation, channeling, and harnessing of this data are strikingly different. Few would argue with the assessment that Amazon.com does a far better job than a library catalog of realizing the full potential of that data.

The “end of the software release cycle” is O’Reilly’s fourth principle. Successful Web 2.0 companies do not have rigid, predetermined software releases. Instead, the software is tweaked and improved on an ongoing, sometimes daily basis, dependent upon a continuous flow of user feedback.

This feedback is obtained by direct means, such as through a customer comment system, but also indirectly via the “real time monitoring of user behavior to see just which new features are used, and how they are used” (O’Reilly 2005). This continuous cycle of improvement actually places website users in the role of “codevelopers,” whether they are conscious of this or not. Moreover, it means that a Web 2.0 product is in “perpetual beta” because there is never an official, finished product.

O’Reilly’s fifth principle is the reliance on lightweight programming models. A website undergoing continual change requires simplicity. Instead of tightly intertwining the various components of a website, Web 2.0 products strive for loosely coupled, often modular systems that allow pieces to be swapped in and out easily. The sixth principle pushes this flexibility of options to the end user. The Web is no longer limited to personal computers but can embrace a whole suite of devices. For example, the digital music distribution company iTunes (www.apple.com/itunes/) and TiVo (www.tivo.com), a personal digital recorder of television, “are not web applications per se, but they leverage the power of the web platform, making it a seamless, almost invisible part of their infrastructure” (O’Reilly 2005).

When these principles are combined and actualized, the Web becomes a more interactive, dynamic experience for all users. There is, in essence, a continuous dialogue between the users and the web pages they encounter, and the result is an increasingly personalized, customized experience. This rich user experience need not, however, stop at the outer edges of an academic library’s website. Rather, the concept of Library 2.0 has been recently posited by several writers (see, e.g., Casey and Savastinuk 2006; Chad and Miller 2005; Miller 2005, 2006a, 2006b).

Library 2.0 is a concept of a very different library service, geared towards the needs and expectations of today’s library users. In this vision, the library makes information available wherever and whenever the user requires it, and seeks to ensure that barriers to use and reuse are removed. (Miller 2006b, 2)

In other words, the same concepts and technologies that are creating the Web 2.0 experience should also be used to build the Library 2.0 experience.

Actualizing Web 2.0 is a growing set of simple yet powerful tools that are turning the Web into an interactive, context-rich, and highly personalized experience. This list of tools is continually expanding, and consequently any attempt to mention them all is rather futile. There are, however, several tools that have become the 2006 poster children for Web 2.0. This small subset is our focus for the remainder of this chapter and the next.

RSS

RSS, an acronym for Really Simple Syndication or Rich Site Summary, denotes a class of web feeds, specified in XML (Extensible Markup Language). In layperson's terms, RSS is a way to syndicate the content of a website. From a user's perspective, this means that you do not have to visit a website continually to see if there is new information. Instead, you subscribe to the RSS feed, and every time the website changes an RSS feed is sent, alerting you to the change.

RSS feeds are easier to explain with an example. Suppose you are an avid reader of the *New York Times* online. Throughout the day, the *Times* website is regularly updated with breaking stories, and you find yourself constantly returning to www.nytimes.com to see what has been added since the last time you visited the site. RSS feeds provide an alternative to this time-consuming process. Instead of visiting the *Times* website again and again, you could subscribe to the *Times* RSS feeds. Whenever something is added, the headline, a short summary, and a link back to the full article are sent to your RSS reader (explained below). Although the *Times* has an all-encompassing RSS feed, it has also divided up its content into smaller, more refined feeds. Consequently, if your interest is only in "International News," "College Basketball," or "Movie Reviews," you can subscribe to a feed limited to just that topic.

An RSS reader is the receiver and aggregator of all the RSS feeds you are receiving. The RSS reader can come in many different forms. Some readers work by sending you the RSS feed through your e-mail. As an example, "Blog Alert" is a free system that sends you daily e-mail notifications of new RSS feeds.¹ No special software is needed. Just enter the URL of the RSS feed and your e-mail address into the web form, and the e-mail alerts start arriving daily.

If you would prefer not to clog your e-mail in-box, there are many RSS reader applications available for download onto your computer. Awasu (www.awasu.com), for example, is a free RSS reader that runs on Window computers. Through a rich graphic interface, Awasu keeps track of all your subscribed RSS feeds and alerts you when something new arrives. As your list of RSS subscriptions grows, you can arrange the feeds into categories, or channels. The software keeps track of what you have already read so that you are not looking at the same content repeatedly.

If, however, you use many different computers throughout the day, you can avoid loading an RSS reader application onto all of them and eliminate the inevitable synchronization problems (e.g., you read a feed on your office computer, but your home computer still has it marked as new and unread) by using a web-based reader such as Bloglines (www.bloglines.com; see

fig. 4-2). Any time you have access to the Web, you can log into your Bloglines account and get your latest RSS feeds. Registration and setup are simple and currently free.

In 2005 the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that 5% of Internet users in the United States use RSS readers “to get the news and other information delivered from blogs and content-rich Web sites as it is posted online” (Rainie 2005, 1). Although 5% may not seem significant, it becomes a much more impressive number when translated into 6 million Americans. RSS feeds can be used to stay current on content from a wide variety of information sources including formal news outlets (e.g., *New York Times* and CNN.com), publishers (e.g., *Nature* and the U.S. Government Printing Office), alerting services (e.g., National Hurricane Center), and vendors (e.g., Target and iTunes Store). The bottom line is that RSS feeds are a cost-effective and time-effective way for anyone to stay current in this fast-paced, digital world.

The screenshot shows the Bloglines RSS reader interface. On the left is a sidebar with a list of 51 feeds, including ACRLog, ALA TechSource Comments, Annoyed Librarian, Blog Carnival listings, Blog on the Side, Creative Commons Blog, ED 506, Free Range Librarian, The Green Kangaroo, Hectic Pace (highlighted), The Information Literacy Land of Confusion, Information Takes Over, Information Wants To Be Free, Inquiring Librarian, Institute of Museum and Library Services, Internet Alchemy, and LibrarianInBlack. The main content area displays a welcome message for 'sgibbons' and a search bar. Below that, it shows the 'Hectic Pace' feed with 130 subscribers and a subscription button. The selected entry is titled 'Information Ecosystem' and includes a URL, a paragraph of text, and a bulleted list of publishers and resources.

FIGURE 4-2

Author's RSS feeds in the Bloglines RSS reader, displaying an entry from Andrew K. Pace's blog *Hectic Pace*

Blogs

In addition to the list above, one could also subscribe to the RSS feeds of interesting blogs. The term “blog” is actually a shortened version of the word “weblog.” Wikipedia describes a blog as “a type of website where entries are made (such as in a journal or diary), and displayed in reverse chronological order.”² Blogs are simply online journals in which writers can easily jot down their thoughts or comments, accompanied by any related links. It has always been possible for a plain HTML website to function as an online diary, but the popularity of blogs really began to flourish in the late 1990s with the availability of free and cheap blogging platforms such as Xanga (www.xanga.com), LiveJournal (www.livejournal.com), and Blogger (www.blogger.com).

An individual’s blog is a personal communications venue through which to share thoughts, comments, beliefs, rants, and raves with the world. A 2006 national survey by the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that 8% of Internet users in the United States (about 12 million adults) keep a blog. There are, however, significantly more blog readers, with an active audience of approximately 57 million American adults (Lenhart and Fox 2006, i). Over the past three years, the number of blogs has doubled every six months, with close to 175,000 new ones created each day. The total number of blogs exceeded 50 million in July 2006 (Lanchester 2006).

Blogger demographics are interesting. Only 54% are under the age of 30, with an even split between male and female. Half of all bloggers live in the suburbs, and a third live in urban areas. Surprisingly, African Americans and English-speaking Hispanics have a greater representation in the blogger population than in the general Internet population (Lenhart and Fox 2006, ii).

For the vast majority of bloggers (84%), blogging is just a hobby or casual pastime. Although some of the highest-profile blogs focus on politics, such as *Daily Kos* (www.dailykos.com) and *Crooks and Liars* (www.crooksandliars.com), the most popular blogging topic (37%) is actually focused on one’s life and experiences. Although blogging is by its nature a public activity, the Pew study found that “most bloggers view it as a personal pursuit,” and yet 87% of bloggers allow comments on their blogs, suggesting an awareness of visitors (Lenhart and Fox 2006, ii, iv).

As with RSS readers, blogs can be hosted locally or remotely. Locally installed blogging software such as Movable Type (www.movabletype.org) is more feature rich and able to support significant customizations and branding. As Stephens (2006, 27) notes, however, the software can be difficult to install and requires some level of technical and programming support. The remotely hosted blogging systems, including Blogger and WordPress (wordpress.org),

are accessible from any computer with an Internet connection and require no technical expertise or support. Customization is, however, limited, and the blogs reside on the host's branded site as just one of several thousand hosted by the service.

The mechanics for creating a blog entry are quite simple. Through a straightforward, web-based form, the author enters text and adds any relevant links and images. When the entry is complete, the author submits the entry and it then automatically appears at the top of the blog, date and time stamped. The blog owner/author can elect to make the blog public to the world or available to just a subset of people and can decide whether to allow others to comment on the blog entries. (See fig. 4-3.)

Accompanying the explosion in the number of blogs is the emergence of blog-specific search engines that crawl the "blogosphere." Popular examples of these include Technorati (www.technorati.com), Feedster (www.feedster.com), and IceRocket (www.icerocket.com).

Wikis

Blogs essentially follow a diary metaphor, with the entries in reverse chronological order and "penned" by a single, primary author. Wikis, on the other

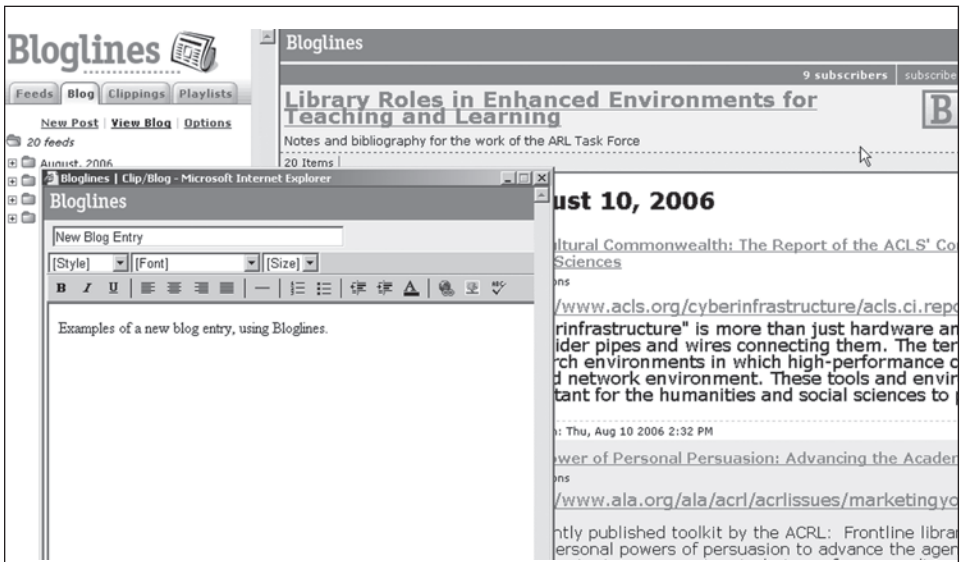


FIGURE 4-3

Screen shot demonstrating how to create a blog entry in Bloglines

hand, are subject-driven information sites that deliberately have a shared and distributed authorship (Ferris and Wilder 2006). *Wiki* is the Hawaiian word for “quick,” which characterizes the speed with which a person can use a wiki. A wiki, as described by the world’s most popular instantiation of it, Wikipedia, “is a type of website that allows the visitors themselves to easily add, remove and otherwise edit and change some available content, sometimes without the need for registration.”³

The basic component of a wiki is a web page with some informational content. Without the use of any special locally hosted software, a person can click on a page’s “edit” button, make changes to the content, and then save those changes. All of the older versions of the page are saved in a history log, whereby errors or malicious acts can be corrected by simply reverting to an older version of the page.

Because wikis can allow literally anyone to add or edit their content, one might presume that the outcome would be of poor quality or chaotic form. In reality, it is the highly collaborative nature of wikis that ensure both quality and order. Wikis harness the power of collective knowledge, because presumably no single person could possibly create all the content. Rather, anyone with expertise, knowledge, interest, or enthusiasm can contribute to the effort. In addition, the numerous sets of eyes that work with the content ensure a high level of quality: “It is the community of users acting as quality control that keeps content in-line and on-topic” (Guenther 2005, 53).

As with RSS readers and blogs, there are many wiki software options available, with a range in complexity. At the easier end of the scale are the open-source Tipiwiki (tipiwiki.sourceforge.net) and JotSpot (www.jot.com), which was acquired by Google in 2006. The more complex and fuller-featured wikis include Tikiwiki (tikiwiki.org) and the German system MoinMoin (moinmoin.wikiwikiweb.de). Tonkin (2005) and Stephens (2006) provide useful overviews of the features and functionalities of available wikis.

Wikis are used as the foundation of all sorts of projects. For example, the wiki Memory Alpha is a large and popular encyclopedic reference for all things related to Star Trek.⁴ There are wikis focused on political campaigns, comic books, travel, and cooking. Wikis can be found in many different languages as well, including French, Polish, Russian, Esperanto, Kurdish, and Bengali.⁵

By far the best-known wiki is Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org), an immense, collaboratively authored encyclopedia. Founded in January 2001 by Larry Sanger and Jimmy Wales, Wikipedia began as “an effort to create and distribute a multi-lingual free encyclopedia of the highest possible quality to every single person on the planet in their own language.”⁶ Literally anyone can contribute to Wikipedia by adding new entries or editing the entries that already exist, and the result thus far has been quite astonishing.

In mid-October 2006, Wikipedia had close to 2.5 million registered contributors. English-language entries alone numbered more than 1.43 million, and when combined with articles in the more than two hundred non-English languages the number jumps to 4.6 million. Wikipedia's rate of growth is astounding. In July 2006 alone it grew by 30 million words, leading to the conclusion that even "a fast reader could never catch up with Wikipedia's content."⁷

The entries in Wikipedia strive to be unbiased, as explained in Wikipedia's policy of NPOV, or "neutral point of view."⁸ Entries should report only facts, not opinions or rumors. Moreover, they should strive to provide a balanced presentation of all possible viewpoints. Although some argue that no act of writing can be completely devoid of the author's biases, the NPOV policy is taken quite seriously.

Wikipedia is certainly not without controversy, particularly with regard to the quality of its content. The Nature Publishing Group decided to test the general presumption that Wikipedia, because it is the collaborative creation of millions of volunteers, is inferior to a formal encyclopedia of the caliber of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. The result of this Wikipedia/*Britannica* comparison "revealed numerous errors in both encyclopaedias, but among 42 entries tested, the difference in accuracy was not particularly great: the average science entry in Wikipedia contained around four inaccuracies; Britannica, about three." Although accuracy did not greatly differ between the two, the *Nature* reviews did note that the *Britannica* articles were generally more readable, "commenting that the Wikipedia articles they reviewed [were] poorly structured and confusing" (Giles 2005). Consequently, when Internet users are seeking accurate, free information, Wikipedia appears to be a respectable source, although it may lack the clarity and readability of *Britannica*. The growing respectability of Wikipedia combined with its astonishing use and growth led Poe (2006) to speculate that "Wikipedia has the potential to be the greatest effort in collaborative knowledge gathering the world has ever known, and it may well be the greatest effort in voluntary collaboration of any kind."

RSS, Blogs, and Wikis in Academic Libraries

Academic libraries can harness the power of RSS feeds, blogs, and wikis in numerous ways. For example, libraries can use RSS feeds to push information out to their patrons. Many libraries post news and events items on their home page, which can be turned into RSS feeds. You can see examples of this on the library websites of the University of Michigan (www.lib.umich.edu), Princeton University (libweb.princeton.edu), and Northwestern University (www.library.northwestern.edu/rssinfo.html).

New book lists can also be distributed via RSS feeds, as is done at the libraries of the University of Alabama, Case Western Reserve University, and University of Nevada, Reno.⁹ It is also possible to add RSS feeds to the library catalog whereby students can sign up for an alert whenever the results of a particular search have changed. For example, the Hennepin County Library (www.hclib.org) has programmed RSS feeds into its catalog:

Run any keyword search in the HCL catalog, and at the top of the search results, you'll find an RSS button that lets you *subscribe to* or *syndicate* that search. . . . [T]he next time a member of the HCL staff adds a record with that phrase in it, you'll be notified. (Stephens 2006, 39)

A library can also add RSS feeds to its subject guides and course pages. Many of the subject guides developed by the College of New Jersey Library include an RSS feed sidebar of recent acquisitions in the respective subject area. The University of Pennsylvania has created the Library RSS Feed Generator, with which the UPenn community can generate RSS feeds for any broad subject area of interest. Ball State Library uses the technology as a means to push out communications from library liaisons.¹⁰

The integrated library system vendor Talis is investigating the use of RSS in libraries through its Project Bluebird. Talis proposes a list of library RSS applications that include

- lists of new books
- warnings that an item will become overdue in the next *x* days
- new reading lists
- advice that a requested item is now ready for pick up
- end-of-term reminders
- alerts that potential charges have reached a given amount
- virtual book groups' shared reviews
- distributions of sound samples for newly available music CDs
- library news such as changes to opening hours¹¹

Libraries can also aggregate the RSS feeds of others and repackage them in useful ways. The University of Wisconsin–Madison has brought together the RSS feeds of some of its e-journals onto a single page that a student or faculty member can browse and then subscribe to where interested.¹² Many journals and databases do not, however, provide RSS feeds. Fortunately, David Walker of California State University has solved this problem with his RSS Creator system: “RSS Creator is a system that allows us to create RSS

feeds for any journal or newspaper indexed and abstracted in our current subscription databases."¹³ By using the data stored within his SFX Knowledge base, Walker's system can create an RSS feed for any journal or newspaper that is currently searchable via the library's federated search tool, Metalib.

Another way to capitalize on the power of RSS is by syndicating the library's content and news in order to increase the places where users can encounter it. If a library provides RSS feeds, they can be repackaged by others into more comprehensive services. At the University of Utah, the library's RSS feeds have been combined with the other news feeds on campus into a comprehensive university news and events service.¹⁴ RSS feeds from the Harvey Cushing/John Hay Whitney Medical Library at Yale University are pulled into YaleInfo, the university's portal.

Another example of syndication can be seen at the College of New Jersey. There the library's feeds are available through the college's course management system, where they are prominently displayed. Through these feeds, the library is able to push notices about recent book acquisitions that are directly relevant to the curriculum of the course (Corrado, Moulaison, and Thul 2006). As a result, not only is the information delivered into a digital tool that the students use regularly, but the library is able to place its resources directly into a context that is highly relevant to the students—their courses.

RSS feeds are also a valuable tool to help library staff stay current. There is an ever-growing corpus of library-related blogs that highlight news, events, innovations, and best practices important to librarianship. Technorati lists close to two hundred blogs tagged with the term "library," including Jenny Levine's *The Shifted Librarian*, Lorcan Dempsey's *weblog*, Brian Mathews's *Ubiquitous Librarian*, and Andrew Pace's *Hectic Pace*.¹⁵ Subscribing to the RSS feeds of these blogs is an excellent way for librarians to keep on top of the latest library trends.

RSS feeds and blogs can be used to keep a finger on the pulse of one's local campus as well. Mathews (2006b) recommends that librarians regularly read the blogs of students on campus, which are often identifiable by their academic affiliations. One easy way to find these local blogs is to search on the name of your institution or library in one of the blog search engines, such as Technorati. While monitoring the local blogs at Georgia Tech University, Mathews found opportunities to answer reference-like questions, market library services and library workshops, and keep on top of problems and criticisms of the library. "Instead of forcing patrons to interact with us, we can enter their domain and seek new ways of providing assistance. By monitoring blogs, librarians can step beyond their traditional role and serve as teachers, mentors, and counselors" (2006b, 2).

Stephens (2006) suggests many types of blogs a library could consider adding to its web presence, including these:

- library news blogs, such as those at Binghamton University and Dartmouth College library¹⁶
- materials/resources blogs that highlight different parts of the library's collection, like UNC–Chapel Hill's North Carolina Miscellany¹⁷
- project-specific blogs, such as the Tufts University renovation blog¹⁸
- user-specific blogs that focus on patron subsections, for example, Library News for Distance Learners at Middle Tennessee State University¹⁹

Blogs can be added to subject and class resources guides, but they can also serve as the guide itself. Librarians can build resource guides with blogs, thus eliminating the need for them to learn how to edit website pages, which can be a technology barrier.

A more sophisticated use of blogs can be seen at Plymouth State University. Here the concept of a WPopac was developed, which is essentially an OPAC (online public access catalog) "inside the framework of WordPress, the hugely popular blog management application."²⁰ It combines the data from the traditional library catalog with the interactive features of a blog, including commenting and tagging. Although still just a proof-of-concept, the project gives a glimpse of the impact blogs could have on the way academic libraries deliver content and, more important, solicit participation from their students and faculty.

Blogs are a way to invite comment from your user community, literally, through the blog's comment feature. Still, a blog has a primary author, and commenters play a secondary role. If you want a true, collaborative partnership with your academic community, then consider a wiki. As students research a topic for a course, they could collaborate with the subject librarian on a wiki of relevant library resources. A wiki could also be used to gather student comments and feedback about library services, renovation plans, or website redesign. For example, a library's subject and course resource guides could be built with a wiki, and together the librarian and users of the guide could work together to create and maintain it. The Ohio University Libraries have wikis for business information resources and film, theater, and literature.²¹

Library-hosted blogs need not, however, mandate librarian participation. It can be equally as important for academic libraries to provide blogging platforms for students but then take a backseat and let the students be the drivers. Lippincott suggests that "libraries should explore blogs as mechanisms for students to exchange information on valuable information resources

they find for particular course assignments” (2005, 13.8). An excellent example is at the University of Minnesota Libraries, which provides a blog hosting service for the university community:

[The University of Minnesota] Libraries believe passionately in intellectual and academic freedom, and our role as advocates for those freedoms. Blogs are an excellent tool whereby students, faculty and staff at the University can let their opinions be heard. Blogs offer a way to rapidly discuss opinions, issues, and ideas, and allow people from across the country, and campus, to connect with each other through these ideas.²²

The service, branded UThink, is free and now hosts more than 3,600 blogs from the university community that cover a huge spectrum of categories including music, food, movies, travel, digital narrative, and books.

RSS feeds, blogs, and wikis are just a few of the tools that are transforming the Web 1.0 experience into Web 2.0. RSS feeds are a way to begin the process of pushing library content beyond the walls of the physical and virtual academic library. But doing this requires us librarians to relinquish some control over how this library information is presented. For example, RSS feeds about new materials purchased by the library may be useful to many within your academic community. But once that information is openly distributed and shared, it can invite students and faculty to question the library’s purchases. Or, in another case, you may disagree with the placement of the library’s RSS feeds in the university’s portal; perhaps it has been clustered with parking and other “auxiliary services,” when you believe it should be a part of the academic cluster. Pushing library content beyond a library’s walls means that your community can interact with it at point of need (e.g., in a course management system) or in a more convenient and efficient manner (e.g., in an RSS reader). But it also means that you must relinquish control over how that information is used and where.

Currently there are few examples of academic library applications of wikis, because they require a high degree of trust—trust that your users, particularly undergraduate students, will take the building of a resource guide as seriously as you do. On the one hand, wikis are attractive because they are both transparent and inclusive. They provide an open forum where anyone can contribute and thereby end the comment we all hate to hear: “How come I didn’t know about that?” On the other hand, some people are wary about engaging an academic community, particularly students, in such an open, uncensored dialogue. Well, if Wikipedia can trust the entire world with its endeavor to create an online encyclopedia, why shouldn’t we be able to do the same with our students?

Starting a blog or wiki can be threatening because it forces librarians out of the role of expert and into the more vulnerable role of guide and collaborator. But guides and collaborators, not experts, are what Net Generation students seem to be seeking, as a consequence of their team-focused upbringing. As Harder points out, “We’ve moved from a time when the web was mostly a ‘read-only’ technology, to an era where the many can now ‘read-write-and-participate’” (2006, 54). Don’t we want our library patrons to feel the same about our library websites? Imagine the sense of ownership and community that would foster.

NOTES

1. Find it at <http://www.shootthebreeze.net/blogalert/index.php>.
2. Quoted from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blogs>.
3. Quoted from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki>.
4. See http://memory-alpha.org/en/wiki/Main_Page/.
5. Regularly updated lists of wikis can be found at <http://meta.wikimedia.org>.
6. Quoted from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia>.
7. Quoted from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Statistics>.
8. Quoted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view.
9. For these examples, see <http://library.ua.edu/rss/>, <http://library.case.edu/ksl/rss/>, and <http://www.library.unr.edu/ejournals/alphaRSS.aspx>.
10. For these examples, see http://www.tcnj.edu/~library/research/subject_guides.html, <http://www.library.upenn.edu/blos/feeds/index.html>, and <http://www.bsu.edu/library/rss/>.
11. Adapted from <http://www.talis.com/research/research/rss/RSSresearch.shtml>.
12. Ebling Library RSS feeds at <http://ebling.library.wisc.edu/bjd/journals/rss/index.cfm>.
13. Quoted from http://public.csusm.edu/dwalker/rss_creator/2006/04/solution-for-rss-and-journals.html.
14. Available feeds at <http://www.events.utah.edu/html/rssfeeds.html>.
15. See these blogs at <http://www.theshiftedlibrarian.com>, <http://orweblog.oclc.org>, http://theubiquitouslibrarian.typepad.com/the_ubiquitous_librarian/, and <http://blogs.ala.org/pace.php>.
16. <http://library.lib.binghamton.edu/mt/librarynews/> and <http://library.dartmouth.edu/library/news/display.php>.
17. <http://www.lib.unc.edu/blogs/ncm/>.
18. <http://blogs.fletcher.tufts.edu/renovationblog/index.html>.
19. <http://www.distancelib.blogspot.com>.
20. Quoted from <http://maisonbisson.com/blog/post/11133/>. See <http://www.plymouth.edu/library/opac/>.
21. See, for example, <http://www.library.ohiou.edu/subjects/bizwiki/> and <http://www.library.ohiou.edu/subjects/litwiki/>.
22. Quoted from <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/about.html>.