Public Library 2.0: Two Case Studies from Public Libraries Singapore 9-19

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【Abstract】

A brief introduction to what Web 2.0 is about and what it means for libraries, especially public libraries. Two case studies from Public Libraries Singapore, National Library Board share how the idea behind Public Library 2.0 has been harnessed to engage library users through a blog and user-generated content website. Through this, Public Libraries Singapore has been able to build social networks beyond the library space and further engage its users.

Keywords: Public libraries, Web 2.0, Public Library 2.0, Collaboration

Web 2.0

To find out what is Web 2.0, we explored several definitions found in library literature and elsewhere to get a sense of this new and expanding phenomenon.

Brophy (2007) states that "The idea of Web 2.0 is closely intertwined with the related concept of the 'semantic web'. ...The concept of the semantic web lies in the idea that instead of simply sharing documents with meaning to human beings, the basic stuff of the web should consist of data to which machine-readable meaning has been attached."[1] Other than sharing information and meaning between people, there should also be information attached with the interactions between people so that computers can make sense of the

relationships and the meaning of the information.

Doing so opens up numerous opportunities for sharing and collaboration as computers can then store this information and going beyond this, to provide meaningful information for access.

This is the idea behind Web 2.0 that drives the rise of social networking tools such as Blogs, Wikis, Flickr, YouTube, Facebook, Friendster among others. Here people can use their computers to interact with one another in a seemingly seamless and exponential manner increasing the number of interactions they could possibly have when compared to the few physical interactions and many online interactions pre-Web 2.0.

Put simply, McMenemy (2009) describes it as the facility that "enhances traditional internet-based services by encouraging more user interaction and input."[2]

Library 2.0

In 2005, the term Library 2.0 was "coined by Michael Casey, when he referred to his blog to the work of 'Librarians without Borders', a Canadian group helping to build a library in Angola with the stated aim of improving 'access to information resources regardless of language, religion, or geography, by forming partnerships with community organizations in developing regions'." (Brophy, 2007)

Here we see the idea of a networked world without any boundaries and the possibility of free access to information resources, not constrained by geographical hindrances. Therefore, anyone with an internet connection could get online and access this vast sea of resources without having to meet or communicate with the original person or source.

To drill down further, Wikipedia defines the focus of Library 2.0 as "user-centered change and participation in the creation of content and community."[3] In this manner library users can contribute to building up the library and its community and gain a sense of ownership.

This creates a two-way relationship and interaction between libraries and their users, as opposed to the one-way interaction model where libraries served more as repositories

of information and resources solely for access purposes by library users. This change has created numerous opportunities for libraries to engage its users proactively in a variety of platforms allowing libraries to 'hear' their users. Users are also involved in generating content for sharing and learning among other users.

To summarise this, Chew (2008) simply defines Library 2.0 as "Web 2.0 applied in the library context."[4] This implies the adaptation of the idea underlining Web 2.0 to the library context.

Why is Library 2.0 Important?

Library 2.0 has a significant impact on public libraries. By virtue of their name and mandate, public libraries serve a large number of users in and thus have the most potential for enhancing interaction with their library users as well as providing similar opportunities for interaction among users themselves.

All of this helps to build a network of library users who are empowered and able to interact with each other in many ways. This translates into more user participation and contributions from users to the library.

This is recognized in Wikipedia as "The active and empowered library user is a significant component of Library 2.0." The key tenet behind all of this is the focus on the user or 'user-centeredness'.

Wan (2007) highlighted that "Libraries must give up control and make use of collaborative tools and technology to engage and share information rather than just provide it."[5]

This is a fundamental shift in the way libraries operate and signify the change in role from a reactive provider to being a proactive engager.

Public Library 2.0 in the NLB context

The following two case studies highlight how the Public Libraries Singapore, National

Library Board has used the idea behind Web 2.0 to create the Public Library 2.0 experience for its users. It also shows how this has served to further engage users enabling them to generate content for the library.

Case Study 1
Moving On: library@orchard in transit – A blog about the relocation

In the first case study, the 'Moving On: library@orchard in transit' blog (Figure 1,2), at http://blogs.nlb.gov.sg/orchard/ which was set up when a public library located in a shopping mall, along the shopping belt of Orchard Road in Singapore, was to be closed in 2007. The library was also to be relocated and opened a few years later. In order to engage the library users in the relocation and to provide a channel of communication between the library and the users on the relocation details, the first public library blog was set up.

The library's objective in setting up the blog was to:

1. provide an update on the library@orchard relocation
2. capture feedback on the relocation of library@orchard
3. gather suggestions for the new sites of library@orchard
4. provide a platform for the youth to air their views
5. engage them during the period of closure of library@orchard

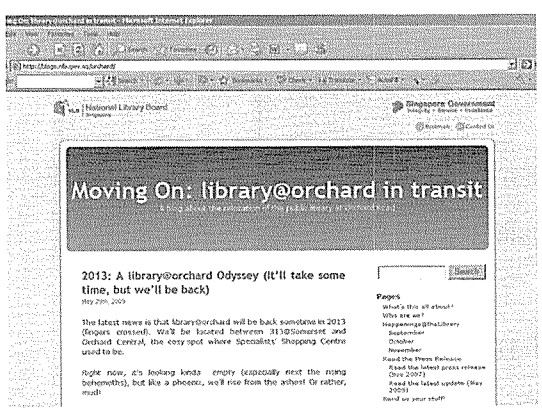


Figure 1 "Moving on: library@orchard in transit" blog

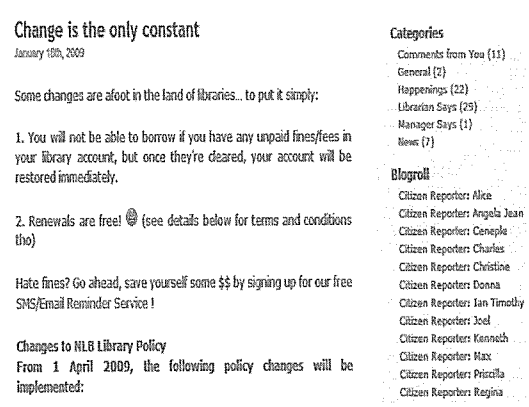


Figure 2 "Moving on: library@orchard in transit" blog

The blog was also meant to be a publicity tool to share information about the special activities, programmes and events organized in the run-up to the closure.

This blog was also a means to keep in touch with the youth and meet them in their preferred online world. The blog was set up quickly and launched during the media conference on 25 July 2007 to capture feedback and public sentiment on the relocation of library@orchard.

The blog, listed in the NLB Corporate website at that time and hosted at http://blogs.nlb.gov.sg/orchard, followed the relocation theme of 'Moving On' featured real-time personal blog postings from the staff at library@orchard regarding the various programmes, news and announcements on library@orchard. It was used to request contributions from the public in terms of their feelings, photos, thoughts as part of the commemorative activities organized for the relocation of library@orchard. The blog attracted more than 2,300 visits and numerous postings both from staff and members of the public.

A first for the library was the use of the blog to get more in-depth engagement through the appointment of Citizen Reporters. These people would get firsthand information about the relocation and access to staff areas such as the office. This call for Citizen Reporters was also done via the personal blogs of staff.

An encouraging response was garnered as 12 Singapore bloggers stepped forward as Citizen Reporters. These reporters would publish their news, stories and interviews on their own personal blogs and link the material/stories to the Moving On blog.

By doing this, the library generated a great deal of awareness and news about the relocation of the library. This was also the first time we had engaged members of the public to report on the relocation plans and preparations, which in most cases of organizations, is communicated via corporate channels by staff.

On the first day of the launch of the blog (25 July 2007), there were more than 1,590 page views. In total, there were 2,323 visits from 31 countries/territories by 2,051 visitors (more than 85% new visits) and 6,094 page views from 25 July-31 August 2007. Each visitor viewed at least 2 pages and spending 4-6 minutes within the blog. On average, this

worked out to more than 60 visits a day.

Other than this quantitative success, the blog also garnered useful insights from members of the public serving as an outlet for the outpouring of public sentiment. Library patrons' comments and insights on the blog included their special reasons for visiting library@orchard, their praise for the staff, for the library collections, for the reading environments, and for the use of a blog to remain 'hip and connected'.

Other than NLB's own blog, members of the public, other then the Citizen Reporters also posted their comments on other blogs and forums, which featured news about the relocation of library@orchard.

1. Blogs
   (1) Vantan.org: Thoughts on the closure of library@orchard
   (2) Digital Terrorist: Losing the library@orchard
   (3) YYZZ: 2007-07-26
   (4) Pervyboy: Performing at the library@orchard
   (5) Smiley Susan: What's Happening? Old Stuffs Replaced by New…
   (6) Youth.sg: Au Revoir! library@orchard
   (7) Tomorrow.sg: library@orchard is Moving On
   (8) More than Pixels: What is Singapore
   (9) Rambling Librarian: The first public library blog in Singapore
   (10) Delusions of a Deranged War Wizard: library@orchard closing by Nov 2007
   (11) Yupgi: library@orchard to close
2. Forums
   (1) Stomp: library@orchard NGEE ANN CITY is closing down due it expensive rental fee.
   (2) Spug (Singapore Palm Users Group): Got 1.4million pple go Orchard library meh?
   (3) Sgforums.com: library@orchard will close Nov 30

On the last day, before the library closed, some of the Citizen Reporters made videos about the background operations of the library@orchard and the closure. They interviewed staff and also patrons. These were screened at the event and also put on YouTube, to share

with other users and linked to the Moving On blog.

This case study shows how the blog medium was used a strategic communication and engagement tool by the library. It allowed the library to not only capture the sentiments of library users provided and avenue to explain the rationale for closure but seek public support and understanding for the future. This demonstrates the importance of the Public Library 2.0 concepts of engagement and enabling direct two-way communication between users and staff. Through this, library users gained a sense of ownership of the library and a new communication channel was set up.

Case Study 2
Public Library Website — Just Share

Just Share is another Public Libraries Singapore initiative that is part of its Public Library 2.0 drive. The service 'Just Share' on the Public Library website of the National Library Board can be found at: http://www.pl.sg/page/PlBrowsePhotos/BrowsePhotoMain&_nfls= false.

Just Share's objective is to encourage people to share and learn through photos and comments. Users' submissions of photos, comments and ratings are published on the Public Library website immediately, rather than being moderated first. (Figure 3-8)

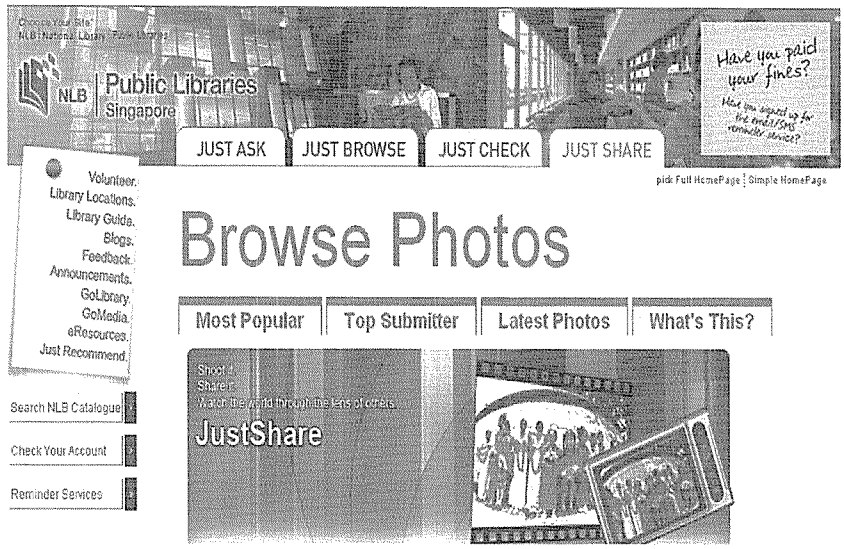


Figure 3 "Just Share"

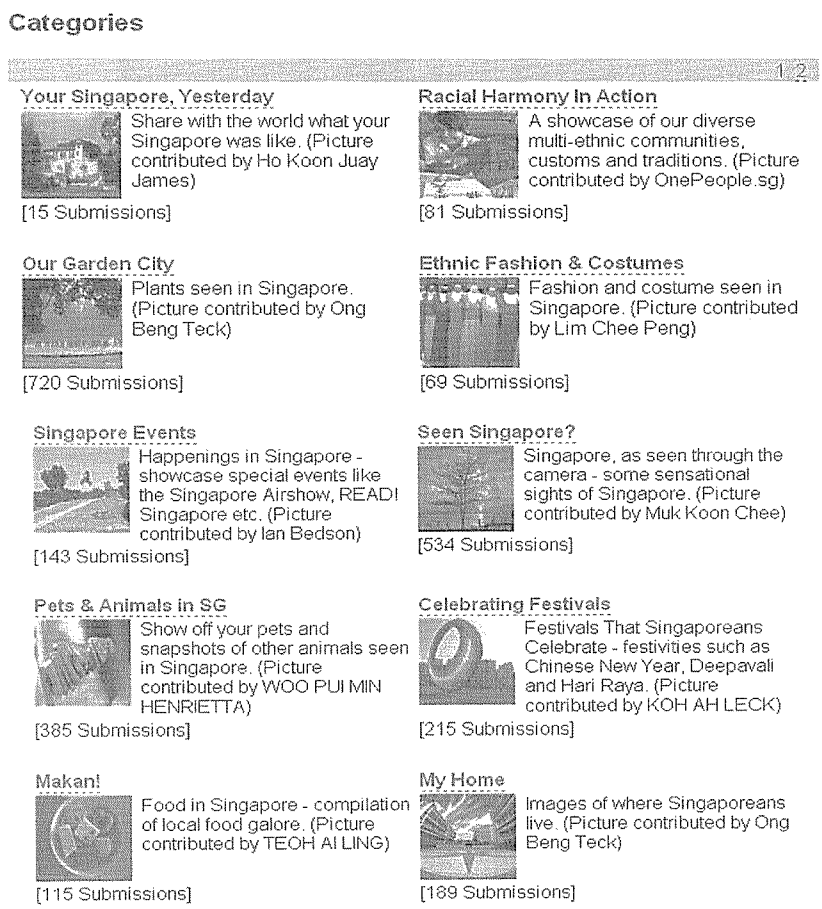
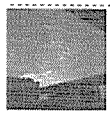


Figure 4 "Just Share"- photo categories

Most Popular

1 2 3 > >>

Clouds in the Morning Sky [Seen Singapore?]



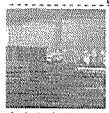
Taken while waiting for the bus... lovely sight to start off a morning.

Submitted by [Chew Siew San]

☆☆☆☆☆ Rate/Add Comments Flag As Inappropriate

4615 Views

Water Spout - Part 2 [Seen Singapore?]



Water spout edging closer...

Submitted by [Chew Siew San]

☆☆☆☆☆ Rate/Add Comments Flag As Inappropriate

4436 Views

Figure 5 "Just Share"-most popular photos

Current Top Photo Submitter - Chew Siew San

1 2 3 > >>

The Seashore Community 37 [Pets & Animals in SG]

Quite a number of fiddler crabs feeding. Enlarge this pic to get the feel of the numbers :) Below are some samples of these colorful little ones. They are indeed lovely to see, & definitely happier out there.

☆☆☆☆☆ Rate/Add Comments Flag As Inappropriate

137 Views

The Seashore Community 36 [Pets & Animals in SG]

Fiddler crab

☆☆☆☆☆ Rate/Add Comments Flag As Inappropriate

102 Views

Figure 6 "Just Share"-top submitter's photos

Figure 7 "Just Share"-latest photos

Figure 8 "Just Share"-comments and ratings

The focus of Just Share is community involvement. Users are able to submit photos of Singapore and post additional information on the subject by commenting and giving ratings. Some entries are supplemented by links to relevant resources such as books and e-resources by librarians. For the library this is an initiative to endeavour to collect user

generated learning content and put in place a model of community moderation to sift out undesirable content.

Just Share was launched on 15 April 2008 on the Public Library website with ten categories that showcased Singapore's diversity and uniqueness. A photo competition was organized from 1 September 2008 to 31 March 2009 to increase awareness. To date, we have gathered a rich pool of more than 3,000 submissions from 338 registered users.

Conclusion

Both case studies show how Public Libraries Singapore has used Web 2.0 to reach out to new communities and how these have formed the basis of Public Library 2.0 in the National Library Board context.

Going forward, Public Libraries Singapore will continue to maintain such online Web 2.0 efforts to reach out and engage with the community, especially the youth in Singapore and beyond.

Public Libraries Singapore constantly explores how such new technologies can be used to enhance existing services and modes of delivery to our customers. It is always on the look out for opportunities to test and see how such tools can be used effectively and easily, both by the library and the community, to enable the public libraries to reach out and deliver services, content and connections to the diverse community it services.

Note

1 Peter Brophy, *The Library in the Twenty-First Century*, 2d ed. (London: Facet Publishing, 2007).

2 David McMenemy, *The Public Library* (London: Facet Publishing, 2009).

3 "Library 2.0", *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Library_2.0 (accessed October 13, 2009).

4 Ivan Chew, "Web 2.0 and Library Services for Young Adults: An Introduction for

Librarians," IFLA, http://www.ifla.org/en/publications/web-20-and-library-services-for-young-adults (accessed October 20, 2009).

5 Wee Pin Wan, "Library 2.0: the New e-World Order," *Library Connect no.* 4 (October 2007), http://libraryconnect.elsevier.com/lcn/0504/lcn050402.html (accessed October 20, 2009).