The VALA 2010 conference was held in Melbourne from the 9th to 11th February at the new Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre.

This biennial gathering is one of the largest library conferences in Australia, and provides an opportunity to engage in discussions on the ever-evolving relationship between technology and libraries.

Health Libraries Inc. purchased a shared registration to the conference and offered half-day slots to members who nominated to attend. The fortunate members report on their attendance below.

**Tuesday 9 February 2010**

*Laura Foley*

*Library, Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists*

**Connections, Content, Conversations:**


The conference was opened by the VALA2010 Conference Committee Chair, David Feighan, with the help of a fantastic video starring three-year-old Abbey – a digital native who summarises the context of the conference perfectly: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_zzPBbXjWs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_zzPBbXjWs)

The first keynote speaker with ‘The Emergent Library: new lands, new eyes’ was Karen Calhoun, responsible for OCLC’s WorldCat, who was able to simplify the directions that libraries are headed globally, especially through co-operation. Libraries must embrace the inevitable change so that rather than insisting on directing users to our tools, we can integrate the tools into our users’ existing workflow.

Karen stated that libraries are:


2. Co-operating to enable discovery and delivery of a wider range of information to a broader audience. Librarians need to re-learn collection management now that so much information is accessed online.

3. Co-operating to understand and engage with local communities. Examples of changing and adapting library services to suit the appropriate users include moving print off-site to increase usage as the library space is then better used for research and study and with circulation dramatically declining, digitisation has increased. NSLA (National and State Libraries Australasia) produced a strategic plan on Re-imagining Libraries: [http://www.nsla.org.au/projects/rls/](http://www.nsla.org.au/projects/rls/)
Co-operating to realise a culture of continuous improvement.

Michelle McLean and Linda Burridge described the massive process of updating their library’s website in the presentation ‘From mess to CMS: the transformation of a library website’ – a similar activity to that which the HLI Committee is currently overseeing. Michelle and Linda compared open source products and chose Drupal for a number of reasons including its ability to be fully customised, ability to load quickly and the range of additional modules for increased functionality. The presentation covered the full range of issues and processes involved in creating a library website so I would strongly recommend the full paper for any librarian reviewing their website: http://www.vala.org.au/vala2010/papers2010/VALA2010_11_McLean_Final.pdf

Simon Huggard and Michele Hosking followed with a paper entitled ‘Go with the flow: data management and synchronisation across systems at the State Library of Victoria’. Known as the SLV2.0 project, the incredibly complex process of integrating numerous systems (such as SFX, Relais ILL, Voyager, Archivist’s Toolkit, Learning Management Systems, Museum Systems and membership databases) into one synchronised workflow was detailed by the presenters. Some issues mentioned included: consistency, accuracy, synchronisation, information architecture, metadata, de-duplication, patron data, and finally, the hope that eventually real-time updating will be common with all systems to simplify integration and workflow. The full details in the paper: http://www.vala.org.au/vala2010/papers2010/VALA2010_114_Huggard_Final.pdf

Michelle Thomason
Medical Library, Ballarat Health Services Base Hospital

On February 9th 2010 I was lucky enough to attend a half-day session at VALA thanks to the Health Libraries Inc. Committee offering access to a conference registration they bought for members to share. Having never attended VALA before I was looking forward to the opportunity to attend such a large conference and hear presentations on topics that, while not being particularly related to my work, were related to the information profession and gave me a chance to see what others were doing.

I attended the following three sessions, two from the ‘Discovery’ stream and one from the ‘Metrics’ stream:

- Michael Gonzalez, University of Western Sydney – Beyond the grave: where to with gen (wh)Y?
- Carol Tenopir, University of Tennessee, USA and Donald King, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, USA – Value and future of library e-resources.

John and Michael both discussed federated searching (or ‘unified resource discovery’ as John called it) and how their respective universities implemented the systems based on the way users generally access resources and use technology. John referred to it as ‘Googamazon’. People are used to information as being easy and convenient and fast but users have to remember that not everything is found in one search. Michael said that although their new system has been well received and that they have made changes/updates based on both positive and negative feedback, ultimately “we can meet the needs of some but not all clients”. Carol raised the
point that libraries are more and more justifying their existence and trying to maintain budgets in an increasingly digital world. She said it is important to get as many statistics as possible from our collections to represent to stakeholders how much value is in our collection and the role librarians play in disseminating information to users.

Overall, after listening to three speakers from academic libraries it was hard to directly identify with the issues and topics they discussed since I work in a regional hospital library and a lot of our users don’t think about or use technology in the same way as their users. But personally it was good to have the opportunity to hear about other sectors and the things their libraries are doing and the way their users are benefiting from libraries having access to new and exciting technologies.

Wednesday 10 February 2010

Gemma Siemensma
Medical Library, Ballarat Health Services Base Hospital

I was lucky enough to go for a half-day this year thanks to Health Libraries Inc. I went down on the train on Wednesday morning and did the Trade Exhibition (brilliant) then attended sessions in the afternoon. Sessions included papers about Trove, from the National Library of Australia; Libraries at the network level, by Roy Tennant (USA); Multimedia applications from the Louvre DNP in Paris and a Top Trends Panel on user generated content.

The User Generated Content panel session proved to be the most informative and relevant to health libraries. It discussed amongst other things:

- How to check user content. Is it authoritative? Should we use the info/tag?
- Treating content as ‘letters to the editor’ rather than sensing them.
- The need for a degree of control, i.e. user must identify themselves.
- The dilemma that we cannot ‘fact check’ everything.
- How not to look at barriers to including user content. Make it easier.
- How as long as the original library data cannot be changed and the user data is clearly highlighted then all is good.
- That tags make this more accessible rather than using LCSH/DDC which can be outdated. This data can be used with synonym lists to make content more relevant and accessible.
- That librarians make mistakes as they aren’t necessarily subject specialists in the field they are cataloging.
- That LCSH/DDC is the seed/structure. Users can go from this starting point.

It was really beneficial to hear about how different libraries operate and to imagine that one day my library will be involved in many of these technological advances. Libraries have such an exciting future.

Thursday 11 February 2010

Anna Stamateles
Australian Red Cross Blood Service Library

I have some knowledge of Web 2.0 and had been wondering what benefit the applications may have to a health library. When I was given this opportunity, I decided to take up the offer and go to all the Web 2.0 sessions. In doing so, I discovered that the Web 2.0 applications can be used very successfully within a library community.
What is 2.0?

http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/web+2.0 defines Web 2.0 as ‘the second generation of the World Wide Web in which content is user-generated and dynamic, and software is offered that mimics desktop programs’. In the example they state ‘Web 2.0 encourages collaboration and communication between users’.

Session 1 – Evaluating Web 2.0 – User experiences with public library blogs

Speakers:
Michelle McLean – Casey-Cardinia Public Library Corporation, VIC
Paul Mercieca – RMIT University, VIC

At the Casey-Cardinia Public Library Corporation, Web 2.0 is mainly used in the form of blogs where readers and library users can read and write reviews.

On http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/blog ‘blog’ is defined as:
‘an online diary; a personal chronological log of thoughts published on a Web page’.

Casey-Cardinia runs five blogs in all:
• Casey-Cardinia links to our past – local history
• Invisible Ink – library news
• Quicksand – teenage news and reviews
• Reading Rewards – adult news and reviews
• Read like a Demon – children’s news and reviews

The aims of the evaluation were to establish the goals, use, access, user opinion and the benefits in order to determine the future direction of the blogs.

The evaluation concluded that goals needed to be modified, that the blogs were being extensively used but by few users and that the access point was from the library homepage.

The benefits of using the blogs were that users could easily stay informed about the library services, they could read reviews from other users and therefore find specific items of interest and that feedback was easily available.

The initiative was therefore considered a success and will be continued.

Session 2 – The impact and benefits of learning 2.0 programs in Australian libraries

Speakers:
Michael Stephens – Dominican University, USA
Richard Sayers – CAVAL, VIC
Warren Cheetham – CityLibraries, Townsville, QLD

The CityLibraries Townsville had run the Web 2.0 course for their staff as well as users of the library. At the end of the course, the participants were offered an evaluation survey.

The survey was marketed by an independent company hence alleviating any bias.

It was found that:
• 85% of participants completed the course
• 15% did not complete the course stating reasons such as:
  o They did not find the course interesting
  o They had no use for the contents of the course in their professional capacity or their personal life.
Session 3 – From Library Automation to Library 2.0: Exploring Web 2.0 tools, while reflecting on our traditional values as we move towards Library 2.0 and beyond.

Speaker:
Paul Sutherland, Christchurch City Libraries, New Zealand

In his entertaining presentation, Paul Sutherland illustrated some of the Web 2.0 applications, such as Facebook, Myspace, Flickr, and Library Thing. He specifically demonstrated how they can be used to benefit library communities. For instance, the library web page of Christchurch City Library has a link to Flickr, where they have posted a number of historical photographs of the city. For some of the images, the origin, occasion, building and/or people in the photograph were unknown. Through their postings on Flickr, the library found answers to some of the more obscure photographs and they were also able to correct information about other photographs.

In conclusion, I believe that health library web pages are the ideal forum to utilise Web 2.0 applications to create communities where experiences and ideas can be shared by library patrons (using Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, blogs) and by using RSS feeds to inform the users of updates.

Kendra Grieg
Library, Dorevitch Pathology

Privacy concerns and social networks in online communities

Amirhossein Mohtasebi and Parnian Najafi Borazjani presented a paper on the awareness of Malaysian university students regarding the threats in online social networks such as Facebook, and assessing the students’ level of vulnerability to those threats such as identity theft and online harassment.

They were interested in finding out if students were concerned about their privacy online and if they put in measures to protect their personal information and identity.

By using Facebook as a case study the implications of privacy as an issue are universal as Facebook is the largest social networking site with some 200 million active users. Information is therefore open to other parties from governments and employers to online hackers, villains and stalkers. The concern with Facebook is the sharing of personal information beyond the confines of family and friends to unknown connections.

Based on previous studies and supported by this research, people seem to be more open in online social networks and are more willing to share information about themselves than in the real world. The researchers were surprised that online inhabitants are far more vulnerable to social attacks than initially perceived. By creating a fake profile, the researchers discovered that 70% of users accepted their friendship request, even though they had no idea about their identity. More than two-thirds of respondents were searchable by their real name. Half of the respondents had not used privacy enablers effectively. The authors argue that one of the problems is that privacy settings created by Facebook are not as strict as they should be.

Whilst the paper is not applicable to the many health libraries whose organisations have blocked Facebook and other social networking sites, the results of research presented issues of concern with the advent of this popular phenomenon.

Finding a new voice: keys to building successful online communities

Fiona Salisbury and Sandi Monaghan from La Trobe University spoke about online interactions in the current Web 2.0 environment. Online communities are now typified by the extent to which users can contribute content and by
a high degree of personalisation, interaction and collaboration. It is an environment based on open communication, decentralisation of authority and the freedom to share and re-use content. For academic libraries, this means that the online community encompasses both isolated individual activity and new modes of interpersonal connection and interaction in relation to discovery, access and creation of scholarly information.

Adoption of well-known tools such as blogs, chat, Flickr, YouTube, RSS feeds, social bookmarking and networking is widespread and indicates many libraries have been quick to embrace the attitude of Library 2.0 and wish to promote interaction with their online communities. Some of these tools have been implemented at La Trobe Library and the presentation focused on participation and whether there was an increase in interactivity in the online communities, namely the blogs and discussion board. The presenters analysed the level of engagement by the students, both with topics the librarians had initiated and those that the students had initiated.

Although the participation rate in discussion was low compared to the number of students on campus, the initiative was still viewed as successful. Many of the questions would not have been asked in the library and the forum allows other students the opportunity to see what is being asked and participate in the conversation or to simply learn from the questions and answers being posted.

Academic libraries such as La Trobe must be applauded for embracing and utilising Web 2.0 tools as a means of connecting the online community. The library can reach out to users by disseminating information and engage with students by encouraging user participation.

Ellen Forsyth gave an interesting presentation of how online communities can develop both personally and professionally through sharing.

She gave three examples of wikis which have been established for and managed by public librarians in New South Wales, namely reference and information staff. There was a discussion of the different purposes of the wikis, their effectiveness, planning, outcomes, time frames and software.

The wikis are being explored as ecosystems, equivalent to the use of the term referring to the environment, because they flourish with a diversity of participation and with people having varying roles. They also have a time of fast growth and a time when slower and more detailed processes are undertaken. Public libraries must be involved with interaction and collaboration.

Ellen then presented a statistical analysis of their usage, success and lessons learnt through the project. Survey questions were posed to ascertain why people are attracted to participating in and contributing to the wikis.

The concept of using wikis as a tool for providing information and facilitating discussion amongst colleagues spread over a wide geographical area is a novel concept. More importantly it allows everyone to contribute, however, Ellen stressed that it shouldn’t replace face-to-face meetings. Wikis as a tool is an initiative which could be incorporated in the health library sector.

Wiki Ecosystems: the development and growth of the online communities of practice

Closing speaker

The closing speaker for the conference was McKenzie (Ken) Wark, an Australian residing in New York, who spoke about the ‘network book’.

Ken is the author of *Hacker Manifesto*, a book which focuses on discussion of intellectual property in the digital age. Ken posted a draft of the book on a web-based template and
welcomed comments from the public. It was those comments that provided the feedback for the re-editing of the text. The process was akin to outsourcing the proofreading and allowed the author to interact with a diversity of people and different viewpoints. The book was then posted as a second draft and again comments were welcomed. This time there were few so the third and final version went into print.

This method of self-publication is an interesting way an author can publish a book without the time consuming processing of dealing with editors and publishers.

After the talk the ensuing discussion with the audience was about the role of the book in the electronic age and with the advent of e-books and e-readers – a timely topic.

After the final speaker there were closing remarks and thank-you presentations to the organisers. The conference was deemed a success and delegates invited to the Online Conference in Sydney in 2011. Delegates were invited for farewell drinks in the foyer of the Convention Centre and this was a welcome opportunity to network with health library friends over drinks and nibbles.