

Social Networking and Your Library OPAC!

by Barbara Fiehn

While many schools are blocking access to social networking applications on the internet, school library automation OPACs are beginning to provide such applications to students and staff. Talking with school library media specialists about this emerging trend provided an interesting insight to their hesitations and acceptance. However, before exploring the consumer thought, let's explore what we are talking about and what the vendors have to say.

Many school library media specialists and other educators are well acquainted with Web 2.0 social networking applications. In the simplest terms, Web 2.0 is the use of internet technologies to enhance information sharing and the creative and collaborative development of projects. Web 2.0 has led to the development of web-based communities such as MySpace, tagging sites such as Delicious and LibraryThing, and innumerable wikis and blogs. Amazon.com users have been using these in-

teractive features for some time. As you search Amazon you see customer reviews and ratings, suggested lists, and a variety of other social network features. Borders has recently redeveloped its website to provide users with a more bookstorelike experience.

For a few years the concept of integrating Web 2.0 into library automation has been discussed by Casey Bisson (<http://maisonbisson.com/blog/post/10956>), Marshall Breeding (www.librarytechnology.org/blog.pl?SID=20080722200653076&code=&BlogID=1), and others. As early as 2005, Paul Miller and Talis director Ken Chad were providing a wake-up call to the library community about the need for changes in library automation. They felt electronic catalog technology lacked the ability to integrate into the new version of the web. Providing user experiences that equaled those on the internet was, in their opinion, necessary if libraries were to stay viable information providers.

MAKING THE MOVE FROM INTERACTIVE COMMUNITIES TO OUR OPACS

Auto-Graphics

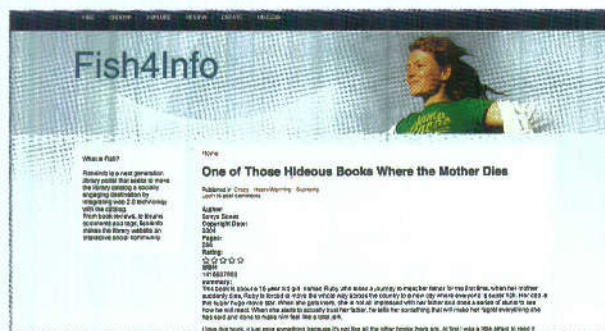
Just over a year ago Auto-Graphics (www4.auto-graphics.com/solutions/libraries.htm) developed an OPAC product, Agent, that delivers tools to improve information discovery while also addressing the new nature of the social web. Agent includes a clustered results engine, user tagging, user comments, reviews, ratings, added subjects and keywords, and other information to provide peer input to library collections, as well as many other user-centered applications.



Auto-Graphics

Fish4Info

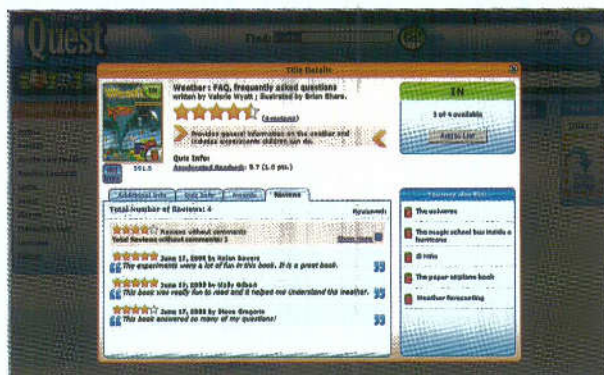
Not willing to wait on vendor development, Christopher Harris, coordinator for Genesee Valley BOCES, has taken the issue of integrating Web 2.0 with library automation into his own hands. Using open source Drupal, he has constructed a library portal, Fish4Info, (<http://fish4info.org/gofish>) which provides about half of the BOCES libraries the capability to append pathfinders, calendars, students' book reviews, tagging, book ratings, and social bookmarking to the systemwide catalog.



Fish4Info

Follett's Destiny

The first school library automation system to integrate such features was released this past July by Follett Software Co. Destiny Library Manager v8.5 Destiny Quest provides an online searching interface designed to catch the attention of students used to using the internet. The standard search interface combines with social networking in a colorful graphical environment allowing students, teachers, and staff to give star or text ratings to books and submit text, audio, or video reviews. The school community can recommend books to each other, suggest items for purchase, and request additional copies. Destiny Quest also improves the ability to upload digital objects to MARC records. This upgrade also provides Destiny users with a free, 65-title ebook collection.



Destiny Quest

To develop an understanding of what other vendors are doing, I talked to SirsiDynix and Mandarin. They are close behind Follett in bringing Web 2.0 features to their systems.

SirsiDynix's Enterprise

SirsiDynix has built on tools that exist within their products for their summer release of the Enterprise search engine and coming third-quarter releases. The Google-like Enterprise uses "Fuzzy" search logic and "Faceted" finding aids. In developing this product SirsiDynix has applied eye-tracking studies to provide optimum graphical interfaces by general age level.

While many **SCHOOLS ARE BLOCKING ACCESS** to social networking applications on the internet, school library automation **OPACS ARE BEGINNING TO PROVIDE SUCH APPLICATIONS** to students and staff.

Fuzzy search logic provides search results even in cases of simple misspelling or variations in suffixes and prefixes. A "did you mean" response to the searcher is based on dictionary matching of within plus or minus 3 letters.

Faceted finding aids allow narrowing of search results by categories, such as author, subject, publication date, and language, so users can easily find specific records within a result set. Facets can be used together, narrowing by first one facet and then by additional facets until the results have been narrowed to the users search need.



SirsiDynix Enterprise

Enterprise also provides the groundwork that will support community/social networking capabilities in future releases, such as user reviews, rankings and tagging, building of favorite author and types of books lists, and reader's advisory. They are engaging customers in discussions of how these social networking features will work and how they will affect staff time in monitoring.

Mandarin's OPAC

Mandarin Library Automation is also responding to the call for more interactive OPAC capabilities. The Mandarin OPAC is changing to provide a Windows experience in a web format. The move to a .NET framework for the OPAC heralds upcoming innovations for Mandarin.

While Mandarin is looking at patron input of data via social networking tools, the immediate changes will be in search capability. Integrating with an organization that is already providing tagging, the Mandarin search engine will provide a "tag cloud" of alternative words related to a search. This tag cloud will assist searchers in narrowing and expanding their searches. Reader's advisory will be offered through an "if you like this you may like this" offering.

While the OPAC functions are important, Mandarin is also developing its core components. Most notably, Oasis has been improved to provide better Authority control.



Mandarin Library Automation

The hosting service provided by Mandarin is growing as libraries of all sizes discover the economic viability of letting the vendor support the total IT needs of the automation system.

WHAT LIBRARY MEDIA SPECIALISTS SAY

I contacted a few library media specialists to get their views on social networking and their automation systems. I found common threads in their responses. First, there is hesitation based on lack of knowledge of how this will really work in their schools. How much time will it take to monitor student input? Overall, the people I talked with had a cautious but enthusiastic "let's see what happens" attitude.

Can the library catalog really play an important role in the Google- and Amazon-centric universe? We may be kidding ourselves if we think that young people will see any library product as having a central role, or even an important sideline role, in their information universe.

But I think these latest enhancement will be engaging for the students, and also for the teachers. I can see many applications for book reviews and recommendations, which would provide a way for teachers and students to communicate beyond the school setting and school term. I say, "Bring it on!"

Barbara Fiehn is an assistant professor at Western Kentucky University, College of Education, Department of Special Instructional Programs. She teaches school library media classes and has an interest in MARC cataloging and automation. She may be reached at barbara.fiehn@wku.edu.



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