Book Reviews

WEBSTER Peter M. *Managing Electronic Resources: New and Changing Roles for Libraries*. Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2008. ISBN 9781843343684 (pbk)

This book provides comprehensive and up-to-date coverage of the issues facing librarians involved in managing electronic resources, emphasising the huge changes that have taken place in little over a decade. There has been rapid growth in the quantity and diversity of electronic collections, including journals and other electronic materials – e-books, reference materials and many kinds of local deposit materials.

The author, Peter Webster, argues that traditional library systems are not suited to the needs and expectations of the library users of today. Methods and practices continue to be centred on the integrated library system (ILS) and machine-readable cataloguing (MARC). Although these methods have been adapted for the electronic environment, current practices are ineffective in dealing with the pace, volume and diversity of electronic materials. The world wide web has transformed search and retrieval, communications and our relationship with information. There are now new possibilities and new expectations.

Library services are often judged against Google, Amazon and their ilk. Webster rightly argues for a more unified information environment, in order to create a seamless experience for information seekers. To give one example, he compares the basic library catalogue model with a new model for managing electronic materials. In this model, management and delivery of electronic collections are dependent on many interconnected library and vendor maintained systems. The key point, repeated often in the book, is that users of libraries should be able to access the information they need directly, without having to jump between multiple portals or interfaces.

Webster also examines the modes of provision of electronic content products, from large aggregated full-text and indexing databases to individual journal web pages, describing differences and overlaps between the various types of provision.

Although not explicitly spelt out, more often than not the content seems to be slanted towards larger libraries. The assertion that "libraries have been recognising for some time that individual assessment of each item to be purchased is often not viable given the volume of material to be selected" may apply in large academic and/or public libraries, but does not ring true for me, and, I suspect, many colleagues in the legal information sector. A combination of tight budgets and specialist knowledge mean that we have to give serious consideration to all potential purchases.

This book is one of the Chandos Information Professional Series, which "are designed to provide easy-to-read and …practical coverage of topics…of interest to librarians and other information professionals." The author clearly displays expertise in the subject. However, as someone with little direct knowledge and experience in this area, at times I found it a far from easy read. The preponderance of unfamiliar acronyms and technical jargon became exhausting at times, and a glossary would have been welcome. Perhaps the book works best as something to dip into when information is required on a specific subject – for example, when needing to know more about link resolvers and their role in electronic resources management. For anyone who may be directly responsible for managing electronic resources now or in the future, this would be a useful book to have to hand.

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COOK Niall *Enterprise 2.0: How Social Software Will Change the Future of Work*. Hampshire: Gower Publishing Limited, 2008. ISBN: 9780566088001 (hbk): £45.00, 180 pp.

Having felt slightly left behind by the kids and their new fangled social software (Web 2.0 to we information professionals), I found myself intrigued by a book whose premise was how to embed successfully Web 2.0 technologies within daily working life, increasing productivity and efficiency in the process. This would be the proverbial hard sell, for surely 'Twittering' during working hours would result in a decrease in productivity rather than the opposite.

To end all suspense, I will nail my colours to the mast from the outset – *Enterprise 2.0* is, in my opinion, a significant publication. The book is not a solutions manual per se, more a thought leader. Niall Cook – Worldwide Director of Marketing Technology at Hill & Knowlton and founder of Cogenz Ltd - provokes the reader into assessing information flow, and the tools needed to facilitate it, with deft skill. The basic premise of many organisations is that social software is the enemy of enterprise, distracting employees from their work and fostering a time-wasting culture. Cook argues that this is only the case if we let it be. Indeed, a very strong case is made that we ignore employees' favoured software applications at our peril. Not only is social software more economical than the

budget-breaking vendor solutions to which we have all become accustomed - and have to persuade our colleagues to embrace - but Cook also suggests that there would be little need to cajole people into actually using social software solutions. Facebook users don't need their arms twisted to use this seemingly ever-present application, they simply *do* use it, and in ever increasing numbers. Give the following some thought: when was the last time you saw – or even heard of - a Twitter user tearing their hair out because of the counter-intuitive nature of the software? Don't all answer at once…..

Cook states that the users are loyal to certain Web 2.0 applications because they, the collective user, have chosen these applications above all the others. We don't need Mr Cook to tell us that, but what he then directs our attention to is the logical conclusion we should draw from the social software revolution: web 2.0 applications are user-vetted, so the simplest and most effective software has risen to the top, *ready and waiting for enterprise implementation*. Currently many organisations are reticent about harnessing tried and tested (by millions) technology that our people already know how to use and – get this – actually *like* using.

En route to exploding such thinking, Cook guides us through the potential enterprise uses of blogs, wikis, social bookmarking, social networking, tagging and RSS, exploring the ways in which such software can be applied in various situations to increase productivity, information flow and user satisfaction. Social software is given an historical context and the reason for its sudden pre-eminence - even though such applications have been created and used in isolation for decades - is examined. The book is clearly laid out, with useful figures appearing in the same vicinity as the text that refers the reader to it - no mean feat judging by other publications I have read that have forced me to thumb through multiple pages on a diagram hunt! The layout of the book is as crisp and common-sense-simple as the ideas Cook endeavours to share with his readership.

I half expected to give this book a negative write-up, and feel a slight pang of shame at making the admission. I, like many others, had dismissed much social software as light-weight and frivolous. For example, I had encountered wikis and, for a time, was quite enamoured of them until I discovered the theory didn't quite match the practice in many cases. Cook manages to pin-point all the areas that many of us had already identified as problematic (such as reluctance on the part of users to create new content, and difficulty in maintaining the focus of the wiki) and provides a framework for wikis defining in precise terms when to deploy and not to deploy them. With an incredibly informative case study to illustrate his point, Cook shows that wikis are no where near as flexible as many of us have been led to believe, but, if

employed correctly in the limited scenarios in which wikis flourish, can be an invaluable tool. And don't forget RSS, which Cook insists should be a standard feature of all social software implementations – invite people to the party; don't sit back and expect them to stumble across it. After all, if staff "don't know about the conversion, then they have no incentive to join in." How many enterprise blogs, wikis and social networking efforts have fizzled because of this very deficit?

It is this 'no punches pulled' approach that makes this book such an eye-opener. Cook convincingly argues that the Enterprise 2.0 story will follow the same script no matter how organisations choose to react to it - he cites various surveys, including one revealing that a third of employees chose to ignore their companies' policy edicts when they happened upon a better way to get things done using Web 2.0 technologies. People will choose the simplest most effective method of doing the work, be it with managerial blessing or by the back door, so we had better get on board. Elsewhere in the book, Cook proudly acknowledges that "the world of Enterprise 2.0 is the world of the perpetual beta… applications that are always being developed but "never finished". What Cook manages to do with such aplomb is to convince the reader that the 'perpetual beta' is a good thing - that there is real, tangible, realisable potential in the Enterprise 2.0 proposal.

Once the reader has traversed the initial scene-setting chapters and enters the heart of the book he finds himself marvelling at the possibilities Enterprise 2.0 could, and should, present. Brimming with ideas and infectious enthusiasm for the subject, *Enterprise 2.0* has only one potentially major flaw. Cook correctly states that the next generation of enterprise workers will have been immersed in 2.0 technologies from an early age, and therefore organisations should seize upon this expertise. From my observations of Generation 2.0, it would appear that most of them go online to view, rather than to learn or execute. As a result they are masters at instant messaging, but diabolical at information extraction techniques, such as search and result interpretation. They use 2.0 applications to scratch the surface, rather than mine the depths. By relocating Web 2.0 software, Enterprise 2.0 could inadvertently be removing these applications from the only context within which they truly work – in other words, Enterprise 2.0 could be another fad-in-the-making. I am, however, reluctant to pour cold water at this stage of the game and so simply encourage anyone in the habit of steering clear of 2.0 (feel no shame - I have many friends and colleagues who happily sneer at the term) to avail themselves of Cook's treatise. It ultimately turns out to be quite a good read.

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