



## **Value of Social Networking in Libraries and Information Organizations in Asia and Oceania**

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## **Abstract**

*In 2005 Tim O'Reilly coined the phrase Web 2.0. The term Web 2.0 is a new web environment (O'Reilly, 2005) including Weblogs, Wikis and Syndications. Libraries and other information organizations are beginning to incorporate these applications as a means of creating more interactive, user centered library and information services.*

*The main purpose of writing this paper is to highlight the value of social network and to appreciate the initiative taken by IFLA ALP in providing a platform for this joint effort.*

*IFLA ALP is a core IFLA program and provides developing countries with financial and administrative support. Each year IFLA ALP is providing scholarships to attend short courses on IL and IT in Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. In the year 2008 there were 9 participants from Asia and Oceania such as Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Nepal, Philippines, Solomon Islands and Pakistan. They are representing different libraries and information organizations such as university, school, forces libraries and government departmental libraries as well as university academic departments. The IFLA ALP workshop on IL and IT was a glimpse into the informational landscape that would help to gain a clear idea about emerging technologies. This exposure helped us to commence a social network among participants in the year 2008 with the use of Web 2.0 tools.*

*With a scant knowledge of HTML a hosted online blog is the perfect solution for implementing a social network. Weblogs are performing many ways including giving as a platforms for academics views, news outlets and research outlets for information sharing and collaboration. The IFLA ALP IL and IT group 2008 is communicating online to share ideas, experiences and information on Information Literacy and Information Technology. It enabled group members to acquire an extensive experience in IL and IT. Further it has resulted to link the group as a second home.*

*Digital divide is the major barrier when implementing a social network through web 2.0. At the beginning of the process, using skype the group has minimized the identified barriers and has stepped forward.*

*The social network proposed would be the focal point for the development of similar networks in Asia and Oceania region and it would also set standards for the member countries to follow.*

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[www.Oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/fim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-2.0.html](http://www.Oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/fim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-2.0.html)  
(accessed: 1st September 2009)*

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The main purpose of writing this paper is to highlight the value of social network and to appreciate the initiative taken by IFLA ALP in providing a platform for this joint effort.

### **Social Networking and Its value**

In the knowledge society in addition to technical skills and access to information technologies, it is becoming increasingly important for people to have diversified and supportive social connections.

Social Networking – It is the way the 21<sup>st</sup> century communicates now. The term social networking refers to a process of relationship building among a group of people who have a common interest (What is Social Networking, 2010). Also social networking is the grouping of individuals into specific groups, like small rural communities or a neighborhood subdivision. Although social networking is possible in person, especially in the workplace, universities and high schools, it is most popular online. The internet is filled with millions of individuals who are looking to meet other people, to gather and share first hand information and experiences about golfing, gardening, aesthetics and cosmetic surgery, developing friendships or professional alliances, finding employment, business – to – business marketing etc.

When it comes to online social networking websites are commonly known as social networking web sites and promote a number of social network services. It allows users to share ideas, activities, events and interests within the individual networks.

In general social networking services allow users to create a profile for themselves and can be broken down into two broad categories. Internal Social Networking (ISN) and External Social Networking (ESN) (MySpace, Facebook, Twitter and Bebo..etc) . An ISN is a closed / private community that consists of a group of people within a company, association, society, education provider and organization or even an “invite only” group created by a user in a ESN. ESN’s can be smaller specialized communities or they can be large generic social networking sites.

However, whether specialized or generic there is commonality across the general approach of social networking sites. Users can upload a picture of themselves, create their ‘profile’ and can often be “friends” with other users. In most social networking services, both users must confirm that they are friends before they are linked. For example, if Duncan lists Molder as a friend, then Molder would have to approve Duncan’s friend request before they are listed as friends. Some social networking sites have a “favorites” feature that does not need approval from the other user. Social networks usually have privacy controls that allow the user to choose who can view their profile or contact them, etc.

Social networking sites typically have a section dedicated to comments by friends. On Friendster, this section is called “Testimonials”. On Facebook, this section is called “The

Wall”. In the beginning, this was a feature that encouraged people to write messages about the person in the profile. But over time, people started writing creative testimonials back, creating a form of conversation.

Some social networks have additional features, such as the ability to create groups that share common interests or affiliations, upload or stream live videos and hold discussions in forums.

Another social network allows professionals to exchange information, opportunities and ideas. Professionals are able to stay informed with new knowledge about their field.

Social networks are also being used by teachers, lecturers and students as a communication tool. Because many students are already using a wide – range of social networking sites, teachers and lecturers have begun to familiarize themselves with this trend and are now using it to their advantage. Teachers, lecturers and professors are doing everything from creating chat room forums and groups to extend classroom, discussion to posting assignments, tests and quizzes to assisting with homework outside of the classroom setting. Social networks are also being used to foster teacher – parent communication. These sites make it possible and more convenient for parents to ask questions and voice concerns without having to meet face to face.

The use of online social networks by libraries and information organizations is also increasingly prevalent and a growing tool that is being used to communicate with more potential library users, as well as extending the services provided to individual libraries.

Various social networking sites like facebook, Myspace, Orkut etc. can be used for this. There web sites help people to build up network and relationships among themselves. In addition to these sites, various web 2.0 techniques may also be used to develop better relationships among people.

Most of the library weblogs had some kind of statement of aims or purposes for the weblog and / or something about the intended audiences. Sometimes this was just a few words; sometimes a formal statement or short paragraph. Below presents the example of the aims or purposes.

1. Provide news or information for users
2. Provide links to recommended Internet Resources
3. Book reviews, information about new books
4. Provide entertainment or amusement for users
5. Provide news or information for librarians
6. Book discussions
7. Provide news or information for trustees
8. Provide research tips
9. Communication among librarians (in a library system) (Clyde, 2004)

Therefore in present society social networking is more important for libraries and information organizations in Asia and Oceania too.

## **Web 2.0**

In 2005 Tim O'Reilly coined the phrase 'web 2.0'. The term 'web 2.0' is a new web environment (O'Reilly, 2005) including Weblogs, Wikis and Syndications. Libraries and other information organizations are beginning to incorporate these applications as a means of creating more interactive user centered library and information services.

## **Weblog**

The term weblog refers to a web page containing brief, chronologically arranged items of information (Scott, 2002). Nichani and Rajamanikam (2001) insist that weblogs are 'personal websites, usually maintained by an individual, constantly updated with new information, personal experiences, analysis, hyperlinks and commentary'. However not all weblogs are personal websites: institutions (including libraries, information centers, professional associations and companies) have created what they themselves describe as weblogs. Embrey (2002) defines weblogs as 'a cross between a diary, a web site and an online community'.

Today libraries and Information organizations have to act as powerful magnet in attracting the users. Therefore marketing is the way forward in transforming libraries for the future (Malik, 2009). Marketing simply means that we push out the services and facilities we can provide the users and demonstrate their benefits. Therefore libraries are involved in

information provision and in promoting and making available creative work and so knowledge of weblogs are important for librarians and information officers.

Therefore weblogs is a source of information for libraries and information organizations. Also weblog is a tool that libraries can use to promote their services or to provide a means of communication with their clients. It leads to social networking in libraries and information organizations for their communities. Hence with a scant knowledge of HTML a hosted online blog is the perfect solution for implementing a social network.

### **Thanks to IFLA ALP**

IFLA Action for Development through Libraries Program (ALP) is a core IFLA program and provides developing countries with financial and administrative support. Each year IFLA ALP is providing scholarships to attend short courses on Information Literacy and Information Technology in Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

In the year 2008, there were 9 participants from Asia and Oceania such as Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Nepal, Philippines, Solomon Islands and Pakistan (Figure 1). They represented different libraries and information organizations such as university, school, forces libraries and government departments' libraries as well as university academic departments.

**Figure 1 – Participants of IFLA ALP workshop on IL & IT 2008,  
Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand**



*Top row left to right : Fairunizan Akbar Malik (Malaysia); Nicholas C. Rubosa (Solomon Island); NorHayati Razali (Malaysia); and Shah Nawaz (Pakistan)*

*Bottom row left to right: Neela Tamang (Nepal); Mano Ratnayake (Sri Lanka); Kristine Hubilla (the Phillipines); Namali Suraweera (Sri Lanka); and Lal Bahadur Chaohan (Nepal)*

The four week workshop included lectures, demonstrations and seminars. The lectures were on themes such as basic information literacy (IL) skills, student learning styles, search strategies, assessment etc. Special practical sessions were conducted and they included development of search strategies, web creation, access of web 2.0 and methodology of producing and publishing good web teaching aids.

The application of sophisticated computer facilities for information retrieval as well as social network services through web 2.0 was deeply observed and studied through library visits in New Zealand. Therefore we gained priceless knowledge and experience from the workshop. Also the IFLA ALP workshop on IL and IT was a glimpse into the informational landscape that would help to gain a clear idea about emerging technologies. This exposure helped us to

commence a social network among participants in the year 2008 with the use of web 2.0 tools.

Weblogs are performing many ways including serving as a platform for academics views, news outlets and research outlets for information sharing and collaboration. The IFLA ALP IL and IT group 2008 has created weblog namely ‘Information Literacy 2008’ (Figure 2) which is communicating online to share ideas, experiences and information on information literacy and information technology.

**Figure 2 – Interface of Weblog – ‘Information Literacy 2008’**



Interesting weblogs are created as group projects rather than as the efforts of individual bloggers. In this case, the weblog owner can give ‘posting rights’ to other people and their posts may or may not be reviewed before they are published to the weblog page. This follows by information literacy 2008 weblog too. Therefore anyone in the group has posting rights and try to always keep update.

When the group members are involved with some projects on, IL and IT in their countries they post their projects information to weblog to gain others ideas in order to. The examples of projects conducted on make the program a success;

- Designing and developing information literacy training module for teacher librarian based on the big 6 model – Malaysia



- Impact of IT on Libraries - Sri Lanka
- Enhancing Information literacy program of DISTED Library – Malaysia
- Developing IL skills among academics – Sri Lanka
- Skill Development to find the literature – Nepal
- Use of the Internet ( Web searching) and it’s technologies for teaching/learning activities and referencing style - Nepal
- Improving IL skills among school students - Philippine
- Importance of learning and practicing IL skills - Solomon Island
- Value of Social Networking in Libraries and Information Organizations in Asia and Oceania - Group paper submitted to IFLA annual conference

Further it has resulted to link the group as a second home (Figure 3)

### **Figure 3 – The experience with Weblog: Information Literacy 2008**

*We would like to place on record our gratitude to Professor Gary Gorman, Dr. Dan Dorner, Dr. Lan Anh Tran, Dr. Philip Calvert, Mrs. Brenda Chawner and Mr. James Duncan of the School of Information Management, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand for imparting new knowledge on Technological Developments and Information Literacy which in a great measure for enhanced our knowledge in several ways .*

*We would also like to give a big thank to IFLA ALP for giving us this exceptional opportunity.*

I am very happy about building a weblog among our group. It is an opportunity for me to interact closely with our group members as well as share our experience and knowledge. This exposure will help me to further the advancement of librarianship in Sri Lanka.



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This is wonderful experience. I have conducted research to the design and progressive foundation of the Information Literacy module for teacher librarians in the whole of Malaysia in general but in the Penang state in particular. I have successfully done this because I gain novel ideas through the weblog. Now also we are sharing our thoughts through this.

We open the new world to live with others. We had unforgettable experience in New Zealand 2008. This is the platform for continuing that relationship among our group as well as share our knowledge. This also leads to tackle with new technology and will help to enhance institutional programs too.....



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Thanks to new technology our friendship is becoming strong day by day. Also we are able to stay informed with new knowledge on Information Literacy as well as Information Technology. This exposure will help me to establish new weblog in my institute too in order to market the library resources.

This opens the window with novel ideas. In a very short period we are able to exchange information on what we need. The Archive is very important. According to our requirements we can go back to the blog and find information easily. Our blog also helped me to enhance my knowledge on IL and IT. Further this will lead me to plan new programs on IL in my school library too.



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I represented Sri Lanka, in the Indian Ocean an island and a developing country. Therefore this exposure gives me a remarkable training on handling today's technology. On the other hand, this opened my mind to conduct lecture series on IL and IT to enhance our academics IL skills in my university. Only I have to post my topic to blog then I can see comments on that immediately from a loving group members. I wish you the success.

When it is compared with other group members in our network I am little bit nervous on using new technology. However, step by step I have improved my skills and now I am on the track. Result of that I have successfully conducted workshop on IL in my institution. Most of the time I feel this is my second home as others.



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This is one of the results of IFLA ALP workshop on IL and IT, Wellington, New Zealand 2008. Information Literacy is vital in pushing out valuable and relevant information to the target users. Libraries can create their own information literacy programmes based on their target users and their unique needs. Various technologies can be used as a package to grab the user's attention. Therefore I have understood with the use of weblog we can do lot. Because libraries have to make radical changes in the way they think and work....

This is new to me.... But I am happy about our members. From 2008 still we are sharing our experiences. Sometimes I feel I am little bit back in my group. But it will again affect me to improve my skills on new technology. Thanks to all.



*Shan Nawaz Mahesar  
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Forces Library  
Pakistan*

However 'Digital Divide' is the major barrier when implementing a social network through web 2.0. The term digital divide refers to the gap between those individuals and communities who own access to and effectively use information and communication technologies (ICT) and those who do not (Digital Divide Network, 2000). Therefore at the beginning the group members who represent Pakistan, Solomon Island and Nepal contribution were not satisfactory. However using Skype and Facebook the group has minimized the identified barriers and has stepped forward.

The social network proposed would be the focal point for the development of similar networks in Asia and Oceania region and it would also set standards for the member countries to follow.

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