Access the Web – Best Practices
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Collaboration and sharing are what libraries are all about and sharing our best practices not only helps to save us time by limiting our need to reinvent the wheel, but also helps to make library services better as we all strive for improvement and share ideas for doing so. Collaboration and sharing are possible through a number of different venues and tools, both online and off.

It used to be that if you wanted to collaborate and share with other library professionals you joined professional associations, attended conferences and workshops, and perhaps volunteered to give a presentation. Not a lot of options there, especially for access services library professionals, who often have had to stay behind to man the front lines while others in the library attend the conferences and workshops.

Jump forward to librarianship in the twenty-first century, and we have email discussion lists, peer-to-peer networks, social networking software, social bookmarking, wikis, rss, online surveys, and blogs. It can be overwhelming and hard to figure out where to start or how to get involved. The websites I reviewed for this issue are all great places to get started – both in finding information and in sharing your own. The more individuals that share, the more everyone benefits.

Library Success: A Best Practices Wiki

http://www.libsuccess.org

A wiki is a website that allows visitors to add, remove, and otherwise change the information presented, making them a truly collaborative effort and an ideal medium for exploring best practices, as it will continue to be changed and updated as new best practices are incorporated. This particular wiki invites anyone who has done something at their library that they consider a success to write about it in the wiki, or provide a link. Information in this wiki is divided into categories, with many topics pertaining to access services including management and leadership, programming, services to specific groups, and technology. The articles in each category vary some according to topic, but include success stories, great ideas, blogs/websites to watch, and specific blog posts/articles to check out. For those of you that like to write, wikis are a wonderful opportunity. Here's your chance focus some best practices light on the often overlooked realm of access services.

LISWiki

http://liswiki.org/wiki/

A cooperative project launched in the 2005, this site is devoted not just to best practices, but to library and information science in general – so any topic related to libraries goes, from bibliotherapy to laptop check out. A keyword search is probably your best bet, unless you know what you are looking for, as many of the articles fall into multiple categories. Many topics still need to be created or fleshed out, so additional contributors are needed. I found that many of the entries weren't really articles describing library related topics, but rather a short definition of the term needing expansions – or what's called a stub. Others, like the article on interlibrary loan, provide more information, but are dry and could have a lot more detail added. Some articles, like that for laptop check out, serve to aggregate links so that you can get diverse information in one place.   "Whether you've got an old paper from library school that's just collecting dust, a brilliant newsgroup post that went unheard, or just some knowledge about libraries that's worth publishing, this is the place to do it."

Atlas Community Portal

http://www.atlas-sys.com/community/

A wonderful example of vendor specific best practices on the web – with discussion forums, expert technical support, and software documentation blended to make this portal one stop shopping for best practices

concerning the use of ILLiad interlibrary loan and document delivery software, and now Ares electronic reserves software. Guests may browse the site, or may register for membership and be able to personalize the portal to best suit their needs. The portal is logically divided into sections that make it easy to go exactly where you need for information – general information, Ares, ILLiad, Odyssey, and OCLC. The sections themselves include discussion threads for announcements, training, policies, hardware, conferences, and even fun things like recipes for those who work up an appetite while looking for information. Besides having links to the many discussion forums, the main web page also includes links to individual threads most recently updated, so if you are a frequent user of the portal you can easily see what's new.

CSDirect Innovative Interfaces Online Service Center and the Innovative Users Group Clearinghouse

http://csdirect.iii.com/
http://www.innovativeusers.org/clearinghouse/

Similar to the Atlas portal, CSDirect and the IUG Clearinghouse focus specifically on Innovative Interfaces integrated library system. This portals are password protected so that they are available only to users, but similar portals exist for other vendor's products as well. I picked this one, well because my library uses it and since I have password access I was able get in and actually see what's available – like the user guides, presentations by other III users, surveys, training resources, product tutorials, and other information. Help Desk manager names, work areas, and emails are promptly placed, so that expert help can be asked for when needed. The sheer volume of information available is staggering, and can target specific needs related to the software. I am especially fond of the presentations page, as it includes presentations from regional, national, and global conferences that I would otherwise never experience. I really like seeing what other institutions are doing with the software I use, so that I can make my own use of it more effective. If you are using a different integrated library system, check out your user group's webpage.

LISNews.org: Library and Information Science News

http://lisnews.com/

LISNews is a collaborative blog, and a source of library related current events news, and is updated frequently. Originally created in 1999, and generally supported by a handful of faithful bloggers, new authors are invited to share any news they find interesting. For those unfamiliar with blogs, this is a good way to get your feet wet without having the responsibly or maintenance worries of your own online journal. The blog defaults to a display of the current day's news, but can be navigated by date, author, or category. Categories range from the expected library topics such as circulation, bookmobiles, and online privacy to the light-hearted Friday funnies, Harry Potter Boy Wonder, and Who Dunnit? Library Thefts.   A poll in the side bar allows immediate input and feedback on a library related current events question, and past polls are available for the curious.

WebJunction

http://webjunction.org/do/Home

WebJunction defines itself as "a cooperative of library staff sharing and using online resources" and the site itself blends many different online resources in providing a useful tool for library personnel. Originally started by OCLC from a Gates Foundation grant, this portal now has many partners supporting it on both the national and state levels. When you first enter the portal there are many options for finding best practices through what others are doing. You can choose to take an online course or find training resources, connect with colleagues through discussion forums and volunteer opportunities, and collaborate through the WebJunction wiki or its niche in the blogosphere – BlogJunction. The member spotlight helps you to put a face with a name – something that is very important in an online world where networking colleagues may never meet face-to-face. The E-Learning Clearinghouse provides information on online education programs and courses for library staff and information professionals, while the E-Learning Institute aids libraries in creating, implementing, and using different forms of online learning. Live Space provides a conferencing service libraries can use as an online meeting space or classroom – great for webinars. Navigation is simple and chances for contributing content abound. A monthly newsletter keeps members updated on events and news – and if you don't find the information you want you can always ask George – WebJunction's advice columnist.

Circ and Serve – Circ. Reserves. ILL. The view from this side of the desk.

Circ and Serve is the new blogging project by Mary Carmen Chimato. Mary is the head of access and delivery services at a large university library. This blog is new, begun just this past January, so it still needs to past the test of time and blog ennui that many blogs seem to go through once started, but I wanted to include an example of a personal blog. Many library blogs exist out there, but none that specifically focuses on Access Services. With her blog, Mary hopes to share what works and what doesn't work as well as the major issues and ideas from her library so that hopefully others will benefit and share as well. Customer service, staff interactions, collaboration, and the access services triumvirate of circulation, reserves, and interlibrary loan have all made an appearance in her posts so far. While this blog is less a collaborative effort than the other websites I have discussed, visitors can comment on posts as a way to offer their input and opinions.

del.icio.us

http://del.icio.us/

Looking for a serendipitous method of finding best practices? Del.icio.us is a social bookmarking website that allows you to now only store your bookmarks and access them from anywhere with an internet connection, but also to share interesting links with other people through tagging them – a sort of linklog. By tagging your links with one-word descriptors, you can better organize and remember your links. Since you can assign multiple tags to each link, this is much more flexible than the traditional folder method used by most browsers. You can also browse other users' bookmarks in your interest areas to see what other people with similar interests are looking at and using online. The hotlist and popular tags list are quick ways to browse popular links

SurveyMonkey

http://www.surveymonkey.com/

If you are just not finding the answers you need in determining the best practices in libraries for a particular topic sometimes you need to do a little research and generate the answers yourself. SurveyMonkey provides a useful tool for easily gathering that information. This tool allows anyone to create a professional looking online survey quickly and easily, that you can then distribute the link to via email. No more poring over paper or shuffling email responses, as the results to your survey are collected in real-time and analyzed for you in graphs and charts. Your survey results can also be shared and you can download the data to Excel if you want to do more. Anyone can use the site freely – but you are limited to 10 questions and 100 responses. If you or your library get a professional subscription, a host of advanced features are possible, including being able to have more than 10 questions and 100 responses. I have found the basic subscription suits most of my needs, as generally I am looking for background information to support a project so that I can show what other institutions are doing when I look for administrative support for my ideas.

Second Life Library 2.0

http://infoisland.org/
http://secondlife.com

What's online collaboration without a little virtual reality? Exploring best practices and collaborating with colleagues doesn't always have to be accomplished through formal venues. If you haven't heard of Second Life, an online 3-D virtual reality community first opened to the public in 2003 and now is "inhabited" by the over 4 million alter egos created by people from all over the globe. Many librarians have joined this community and libraries have been added to the plethora of shopping malls and other buildings. Alliance Library System and OPAL are teaming up to extend the programs currently offered in Second Life, giving the substance to the virtual libraries with virtual library programs and eventually services – from storytelling to online collaboration through panel discussions . The Second Life Library 2.0 blog – now called Infoisland – helps to keep up with the latest events being sponsored by the libraries of the Second Life world. Build yourself a character called an "avatar," meet people, network, collaborate, and have virtual fun with your Second Life.

Finally, for a note of shameless and gratuitous self-promotion check out my Access Services focused blog, The

Unclassifiable Librarian, at http://www.unclassifiablelibrarian.blogspot.com/. Barring any blog ennui that finds me in the future, here you will find weekly postings on the projects I am working on, interesting things that have happened during the week, and all those little activities that unexpectedly fall in the realm of access services.