

Cecilia Penzhorn

University of Pretoria, South Africa

Quality through Improved Service: the Implementation of Social Networking Tools in an Academic Library

In the academic environment Web 2.0 products are impacting on the practice of scholarly research and inquiry of students and faculty. The university library can and should play an important role in supporting their clients' use of these tools. Social networking tools for example, offer a wealth of opportunities for the design and delivery of new and innovative services.

A Web 2.0 / Library 2.0 strategy and implementation plan has been in place in the University of Pretoria Library for a number of years. However, in spite of this focused approach towards implementing the new technologies, it became evident that the social computing tools and techniques typical of Web 2.0 were not being widely used by the reference librarians. This caused considerable concern as the quality of service that the library aims at depends to a large extent on the quality of services delivered by its reference librarians.

This paper reports on a project which was consequently initiated with the aim of motivating library reference staff to actively embrace the idea of implementing social networking tools in their daily work routine, and highlights the satisfying results obtained.

For a successful transition to the Library 2.0 service delivery environment, skilled staff are crucial. Training sessions for the reference librarians in the use of various social networking tools were therefore held. Follow-up interviews conducted several months later showed a gratifying number of tools being implemented. Information on the use by clients of these newly introduced services, and the significance of their use, were subsequently obtained from selected academic staff and students, as the needs of students and staff and their perceived quality of service is regarded as critical for future successful application of such services.

The outcomes of the project show that by advocating the use of social networking tools, the library is in an advantageous position for providing ongoing quality service in support of research and teaching at the university.

Dr. Cecilia Penzhorn is a senior lecturer at the Department of Information Science, University of Pretoria. She teaches Reference Work on undergraduate-level and co-ordinates and teaches the Hons. Research Methodology course and the Masters Programme in Development Communication. She is currently involved in a research project on the implementation of Library 2.0 in the University Library.