Web 2.0: The Future of Archives
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For most people today, it is hard to imagine living without being able to express ourselves via the internet. We like to share our interests with others on websites like Facebook, whether it is news stories, weather, or how much money we just saved on a specific shopping website. However, it seems archival repositories for the most part have missed the memo on how important Web 2.0 is to increase users to not only their websites but their physical location as well. By digitizing materials, posting them on their website and then implementing Web 2.0 features such as commenting on a picture or text, archives will attract users to the website and ultimately to the building. While some websites such as the Heinz History Center's Library and Archives, have taken advantage of blogging and tag clouds, my experience shows that many archival websites have been slow to embrace Web 2.0. Utilizing Web 2.0 will ultimately benefit archives in the long run, but how does a repository website implement 2.0 to provide access to the public and also maintain things like proper preservation of the materials for archivists?

The internet itself is not a new phenomenon, but it has changed how we live our daily lives. When it was first introduced, people were able to purchase items by accessing web pages, use electronic mail (or e-mail) to communicate faster than postal mail, and chat with people across the country or the world in real time using chat rooms. This has been deemed Web 1.0, using the internet to perform basic activities more conveniently. Before long, Facebook and websites like it came along and changed how we used the internet. Web 2.0 was introduced, where our internet lives and our real lives were merged and the internet became an extension of ourselves. Instead of having separate, anonymous accounts with different websites we visit, our accounts now become unified. We post opinions on our walls on Facebook, share news stories that interest us, review items that we liked or disliked on Amazon.com, tag books on websites
like LibraryThing.com, or even leave comments on pictures of tombstones on FindAGrave.com. Web 2.0 has become so integral to our internet lives that when we view a website without these functions, it seems outdated, old fashioned and clunky.

Since Web 2.0 is something of a cornerstone of our lives, why would archivists who embrace technology be so reluctant to utilize it? In 1998, an article was written by Margaret Hedstrom called *How do Archivists make Electronic Records Usable and Accessible?* in which she provides a made up scenario of a student needing more information from the archivist and having to wait for long periods of time for the information she needs. The archivist gives the student the materials that the files are on, a floppy disk and magnetic tape, but they are bulky and difficult to use without the right machines, such as a tape drive (Hedstrom, p. 7). Hedstrom (1998) sums up the problem when she says that “Receiving materials from offline storage and delivering them in outdated formats is time consuming and labour intensive for both the repository and the researcher” (p. 7-8). At the end of the article, she pitches a better situation. The researcher now can search using words she is familiar with, finds what she needs and can put it directly onto her hard drive once requesting it. She now has what she needs in four minutes as opposed to waiting days or weeks at a time (Hedstrom, p. 18). Archives have obviously taken advantage of electronic finding aids and digitization, but the next step in making access easier for the user is to use the readily available Web 2.0 tools to make it easier for non-professionals to access the information.

There have been arguments against moving too quickly into the realm of 2.0, some of them understandable. One reason is the amount of staff, time and money that will increase on top of traditional archival duties. There are also concerns that with a Web 2.0 makeover the
repository could tarnish their reputation with their more serious researchers. Repositories are like a second home for researchers so it is important that they get the help they need as well as novices. In Chris Cooper's *Online On-Site: Transforming Public Services in The National Archives*, he discusses that a problem the serious researchers run into is that novice researchers come in and take up staff time from them. “These developments also caused anxiety to many existing users, particularly long term or professional/occupational Kew readers. They feared that the services they valued would be overwhelmed or dumbed down by an influx of FRC visitors or novice family historians who, they perceived, would take up more staff time, cause queues for services and undermine traditional reading room practices” (Cooper, p. 203). This is also a concern for websites, considering this has happened with sites such as Huffington Post, which was once viewed as a highly trusted news source and has turned into mindless entertainment website. However, because of these features Huffington Post gets millions of views a day. Without implementing any popular Web 2.0 features, though, repositories are simply not attracting casual users to their websites, hurting both their electronic projects and their physical locations.

Digitization itself is also a fear that archivists have for holding back on internet resources and tools in general. With digitization comes the risk that harm can befall the picture or texts. According to Richard Cox in *Machines in the Archives*, (2007), “Some worry about the potential physical damage inflicted by scanners on original documents, mostly worrying about possible damage to originals caused by exposure to the light and heat generated by the devices” (Scanning the Archives section, para. 7). Others point out that simply because digitization is implemented it does not mean users will utilize them more. As Sigrid McCausland (2011) simply
says in *A Future Without Mediation? Online Access, Archivists and the Future of Archival Research*, “digitisation per se does not mandate that use will follow (Palmer, 2009)” (Online Access and Archives Users section, para. 3). McCausland is right, which is why we would need Web 2.0 tools to drive user traffic.

Digitization must be a feature of Web 2.0 archives in order to give users substantial things on which to comment, rate, or to share. This also enables users to preview some of the repository and its holdings. Even though digitizing documents may harm the original, it is a safer way to handle the material, preventing further damage. While working on the Polar Bear Expedition Website, an archival website that they helped put together in 2005, Elizabeth Yakel, Seth Shaw and Polly Reynolds (2007) state in *Creating the Next Generation of Finding Aids* that “in 2004, the Bentley Historical Library had the Polar Bear Expedition collections digitized to increase access and to preserve the originals, which were in fragile condition” (Identifying the Content section, para. 1). These fragile pieces were hurriedly sent to be digitized so users can spend more time with them rather than mourn their early demise. The fears behind digitization are valid, but we have to remember that it creates a reliable pool of information for the user.

A necessary feature on repository websites are finding aids. According to the Society of American Archivists, finding aids are tools that facilitate discovery of information within a collection of records (“SAA,” n.d.). It also describes to the user what the context is, what kind of materials are included and where they might be located. While electronic finding aids are a helpful and vital part of the repository website, they have also been criticized as only being useful for the archivist and not the user (Schwartz, p. 164). Elizabeth Yakel, et al. (2007) suggest that finding aids should include commenting, collaborative filtering, bookmarking, and visitor
awareness (Yakel, Creating the Next Generation of Finding Aids, 2007). These are all reasonable tools that already exist on most Web 2.0 websites. If just commenting were enabled on finding aids, it would spur a small community of varying archival knowledge to ask questions and discuss the materials amongst themselves, at times even getting the archivist involved.

Another way that users can feel involved in the life of the archives is if folksonomies, a feature that allows collaborative editing and tagging, were implemented. In the article Improving Browsability, the authors Gresham and Higgins (2012) talk about the gain of implementing folksonomies:

Mathes (2004) and Theimer (2010) explain that a folksonomy enables the user vocabulary to be reflected, therefore supporting users' information seeking behaviour. One interviewee explained that users often confused tags and bookmarks. If users do not understand the differences between them, tagging systems are likely to suffer from inappropriate use and will not provide the accessibility benefits they are capable of (Interview Results section, para. 1). Implementing a folksonomy in the form of a tag cloud or something similar onto a repository website would be easier for an average user to utilize. If users are contributing language that is popular among themselves, it will be easier for them to search for what they needed as opposed to trying to think like an archivist or an academic. Also, associating these vernacular terms will make users feel more comfortable with the pieces and inevitably the archives.

Web 2.0 also gives users the option to visit the archives any time they need to. They always have access to the documents, electronic finding aids, and can send a quick e-mail to the archivist at any time. This creates an environment where the user comes to the archives on their
own terms, prompting further visits. In another Elizabeth Yakel (2000) piece, *Thinking Inside and Outside the Boxes*, she makes an important point about the relationship between users and archival websites: “Users crave Web pages that are dynamic, real time tools, although analyses of archival Web pages have demonstrated that they rarely are such.” (Yakel, p. 142). Yakel (2000) is clear that what users want from archival websites is not necessarily what they are getting, and utilizing Web 2.0 features are what will get users there.

The implementation of Web 2.0 is really an issue of access. Web 2.0 tools make it easier for the user to access materials in a personal, social and convenient way. In Web 1.0, the user has always been able to access pictures, texts and finding aids on the website. With Web 2.0, the user is now engaging with the archives online as he would in person, such as communicating with the archivist and with other users. In the Emily Monks-Leeson (2011) article *Archives on the Internet*, she writes “archives created online, moreover, represent an expansion of the boundaries of traditional archives by assembling related material in an accessible, easily searchable format” (Monks-Leeson, p. 57). When users feel it is not only easy but convenient to access what they need on repository websites, they will return not only virtually but physically.

Better access to archives hinges on Web 2.0 technology, but what will a Web 2.0 archival website look like? When a user visits the site, they will be able to immediately link to Facebook or other social media accounts. By doing this, they can share a popular picture or text, or even rate it. When they access the search bar they can see what is trending at that moment, or even a take advantage of a cloud tag. There will be an item of the day akin to what Wikipedia features, and a link to the archive's blog or wiki. If the user needs to access an electronic finding aid, it will appear with the option to tag, share the finding aid, comment on it, or even have an ask the
archivist option. These are not tools that are strange to the average user and the affect it will have on the archive is more visitors online and on site.

Although it could seem grim visiting repository websites that are still mainly available in web 1.0, there is hope. Many archivists see the need to begin implementing Web 2.0 features and are either planning on developing them or the developments are already in the works. In “Embracing Web 2.0”, the study done by Mary Samouelian (2009) evaluating how many repositories have already began developing Web 2.0 tools, she writes

Of the 213 repositories evaluated, 85 (40%) host a digital collection, with an additional 6 repositories in the process of developing or 'hoping to' develop digital collections in the future. Of the 85 archival repositories websites with digital collections, a surprising 38 (45%) repositories employ a Web 2.0 application. Of these 38 repositories, 28 (74%) use at least one Web 2.0 application, 8 (21%) employ two Web 2.0 applications, and 2 repositories (5%) employ three Web 2.0 applications (Samouelian, p. 58).

These numbers show that the interest to employ these features is certainly on the rise among repositories.

Once more repositories start following suit, the tools will be there for users to start interacting with each other and able to spread the word about that repository by sharing digitized materials. With sharing will come an increase in visitors on the repository's website, drawing more users to the building itself. In doing this, hopefully, it will generate a bigger interest in libraries and archives in the community. The only thing holding back archival repositories are themselves, and once that changes, there will be more opportunities for users to take advantage
of what they offer. For now, Web 2.0 is where we are headed and it does not look like it is going away soon.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


