Two Weeks to 2.0: A Case Study of Athabasca University Library’s Web 2.0 Project

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Abstract
This case study provides an inside look into an academics library’s project plan for implementing library 2.0 initiatives within two weeks. It explores the project management issues, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of a selection of particular web 2.0 applications. The academic library selected is Athabasca University Library, at Canada’s open university providing graduate and undergraduate distance degree programs to students studying around the world. Since AU Library primarily serves patrons at a distance, the focus of this project was on library 2.0 applications made available through their website. A broad range of applications was considered. Some of these enhanced the service already provided by the library, while others capitalized on the success of social networking, which has developed in the last few years. Some of the applications, while less successful in this two-week project, provided experiences for the librarians that will guide in future procurement of services from their integrated library system or database providers.

Keywords: Library 2.0, Web 2.0, Distance education, Libraries and distance education, LibX, Facebook, Zotero, Tag Clouding, RSS feed

Introduction
Library 2.0 models for modernizing library services have been developing over the last five years. If one feels that a library has missed the movement, then here is a shortcut to implementing web 2.0 applications. The following case study explores the experiences of a library’s project plan to implement 2.0 initiatives.

Athabasca University (AU) Library is a mature organization, providing academic library services to the student, staff and faculty of Canada’s open university since 1970. It has a long history of success in removing barriers to education by delivering distance education to students studying in Alberta, Canada and other places and countries around the world. AU Library’s past practices act as filters to addressing new projects, and the staff’s willingness to develop alternative strategies.

Organizational structure
AU Library has a flat management structure. Each one of its units – public services, technical services, inter-library loans, digitization – has no more than two layers of supervision, with the head of each unit reporting to the library director. They serve 37,000 graduate and undergraduate students (over 7,300 full-load equivalents), 1,200 faculty and staff as well as community borrowers from the northern Alberta town of Athabasca. There are 7 librarians, 3 professional staff, and 10 support staff. The public and technical services librarians hold weekly meetings. On a few occasions every year, these meeting include members of the digitization unit and the director. It was at one of these meeting that the seed of this project idea was planted.

Project idea
A member of the digitization unit posed the question of how many library web 2.0 initiatives could AU Library launch within two weeks. The challenge was dubbed, ‘2 weeks to 2.0.’ In spite of already having many pending projects and commitments, everyone in the meeting listened. Here was the pitch. A short list of library related web 2.0 applications was presented to the group. If each person were to champion one application or initiative, they as a project team could meet the two-week goal. The pitch captured the group’s attention.

Assumptions
Library users were increasingly using web 2.0 applications such as Flickr, YouTube, and Twitter. AU Library wanted to select an open source and open access web 2.0 application, that would enhance their capacity for online researching. Since AU Library
primarily serves patrons at a distance, the focus of this project was on library 2.0 applications made available through their website. When considering an implementation of web 2.0 projects other libraries may include software and applications that would be installed on the library’s public access terminals. This was not a priority for AU Library.

Constraints
All the constraints were self-imposed. The timeframe of executing a project within two weeks at an academic library, seemed arbitrary and insurmountable. They wanted this project to have no budget impact. To meet this challenge they chose to work with open source, open access applications. The project was to utilize existing hardware, and complete the tasks within regular working hours by the team members.

Project description
At their first meeting, classic processes were raised, some of which were slated to be set aside if they hinder the completion of the project within two weeks. Most remarkable was the question as to how each project team member defined library 2.0 services. In a typical project timeframe, definitions of key concepts would be an integral part of developing a common vision for the team embarking on a new project. They consciously chose not to unify a common definition of library 2.0 services and instead fostered an acceptance of various explorations that could be included. As well, they did not engage in the rhetorical debate of benefits and weaknesses of library 2.0 initiatives. Had they be deciding on the procurement of software or services with budget implications, they would have included discussions of the value of library 2.0 in light of any purchases.

In project management literature, compressing timelines from concept to implementation has led to the overuse of the term fast track. Real time synchronistic technology has sped communication and led to growing expectations of immediate business response times. Project timelines, like business response times, have evolved under these expectations. Like any fast tracked project, success is dependant upon setting aside traditional project design sequence. Vertical timeframe was essential as each member took a section and followed it to the end. They didn’t wait for one portion to complete before the next, reducing the need to manage critical milestones. Each team member took an initiative that s/he felt s/he could learn, deploy, and promote within two weeks. Each team member was entrusted to evaluate his/her web 2.0 application and decide how best to apply it to the delivery model of AU Library services.

The time frame of two weeks was arbitrary. Since they met weekly, it meant they would need to complete the project within three meetings. At the first meeting the idea was adopted and initiatives divided amongst the team members, each becoming the champion of at least one initiative. Each team member had ownership of launching an initiative. Their autonomy increased the likelihood of meeting the two-week deadline. The second meeting was a working meeting to address any decisions that individual team members felt needed the team’s input. The third meeting heard the announcement of completions and presentations from each team member.

Why a fortnight? It was long enough to fit into their work schedules but not so long that they would get sidelined. The short time frame focused team members’ attention on the project.

The initiatives in the ‘2 weeks to 2.0’ project were promoted on AU Library’s homepage, the news page, and in the university’s online newsletter. Promotional write-ups were written by the champion of each initiative then sent to the person who was usually responsible for publicizing library events. Thus, the project completion fit back into the regular workflow. Since each champion wrote the write up, it quickened the time needed to launch each initiative.

Here are some of the initiatives that they explored. The first three have to do with improving existing AU Library services; accessing their OPAC and licensed journal databases, letting patrons know what’s new through their Library website, and providing solutions to citation management. Each of the following initiatives enhances the patron-centered participation and use of existing services.

LibX toolbar
AU Library’s LibX toolbar allows users quick access to select library web pages and to search specific library resources. The AU Library website provides links to an online tutorial and installation instructions for the LibX toolbar. It is an add-on application to Mozilla Firefox. This initiative took the most amount of collaboration as they designed the layout, selected resources, and search fields. They chose a display option that would span the entire width of the browser window, so that it would visually standout from the other browser tools. The first button on the tool bar, lists the most frequently used AU Library pages. The search box searches their highest used collections, such as the OPAC and top journal databases. The search field options change according to the selected collection. The idea behind this is to provide access to their resources right where the patron is working online. Providing this in their browser means, that when the patron is surfing the net, s/he can easily return to AU Library to find scholarly resources to support their research. The intent is to make AU Library accessible to the patron where they work online.

The LibX toolbar also allows for multiple field searches, by clicking on the down arrow button, a new search
row is visible. This means that the AU Library catalogue can be searched easily by title and author at the same time. Currently, they do not have an intuitively easier way to construct these searches. This was an important enhancement to the searching capabilities of their OPAC.

**Zotero**

Zotero is a free, easy-to-use Firefox extension to help you collect, manage, and cite research sources. Like the LibX toolbar it lives right where the patron works in the web browser itself. One of the many features of Zotero is its function as a citation management tool. It has 16 different citations styles automatically distributed to Zotero clients. AU Library directs users to the Zotero website, its support tab, and a short three minute introductory video available on the blog tab.

While the library patrons have free access to RefWorks through AU Library, they lose this access once they graduate. Currently, it is not available to alumni. Zotero is a reasonable alternative for patrons to learn while in school then continue to use as their careers develop after graduation.

**RSS feeds**

RSS feeds are available from the AU Library news page. This allows the patron to subscribe to updates from this webpage and have the updates sent to one site, where they can manage their updates from many websites. To succeed in this they needed to change how they posted to the AU Library news page. Every posting needed to include all the three fields of title, description, and link. They met their two-week project goal by posting to the RSS manually. They are on lookout for an automated method of doing this.

The above mentioned three initiatives were fully successful. The next initiative was partially successful. Shelfari is a virtual bookshelf, which allows the patron to view a graphic image of the book on a virtual display shelf. Since most of their patrons, study at a distance, this seemed like a great opportunity to graphically display newly acquired or notable AU Library material. Shelfari also provides the opportunity to search the virtual bookshelf using all the search fields of their OPAC. Unfortunately, the task of maintaining this as a display of new material could not be streamlined into existing workflow. This being labour intensive, proved to be a less successful application to for this library. They continue to provide access to Shelfari since there is the option for patrons to create their own virtual bookshelf.

Another labour intensive initiative was Tag Clouding. AU Library provided a test demonstration of its capabilities to visually display the keywords in the library catalogue. The demonstration showed the results to a canned search, where the size of the words displayed was proportional to the number of results using that word. Since this feature is most valuable when the results are to a live patron initiated search this initiative was not pursued further. The team appreciated the value in Tag Clouding. They may be able to provide a similar feature in a future upgrade of their integrated library system.

**Social networking**

Social networking software often comes to the fore when discussing library 2.0 initiatives. While Athabasca University Information Technology, does not support blogging, many individuals at AU have work related blogs. The experience of other library blogs shows that library promotion often works well when librarians participate in existing online communities rather than create and maintain their own library blogs. As a side note, AU Library has real estate in Second Life and is developing an information literacy tutorial. Both of these would not fit within the short timeline of the ‘2 weeks to 2.0’ project. The creation of a Facebook group, and the promotion of Delicious bookmarking were the two social networking initiatives which they implemented in this two-week project.

The Facebook group is a place for the AU Library community to share their experiences with AU Library, and to provide comments, suggestions, and put questions to other community members regarding library services. The AU Librarians will be on hand to respond and share in the discussions with other library members. They encourage anyone on Facebook to join this group. The group page will frequently be updated on new events and useful tips from the AU Library staff. The creation of the Facebook group was discussed at the second team meeting. The wording, permissions, display, etc. were decided as a group.

Delicious, a social bookmarking site, allows users to tag their own resources and discover what other users have tagged. AU Library is now using Delicious to compile websites that may be useful in researching different subjects.

**Conclusion**

Here are some reasons why perhaps this ‘Two weeks to 2.0’ project was successful. The initial idea was put forth as one person’s dream and presented as a challenge to the whole team. The team members became champions of an initiative, increasing personal satisfaction of seeing the project to completion. The timeframe motivated team members to prioritize this project. Each was willing to uncover the value, to the academic library patron, of their given web 2.0 initiative. Social, positive peer pressure, informed personal investment led to an unprecedented 100% participation. This project was part of AU Library’s ongoing efforts to provide staff and students with the most up-to-date technologies.