

Social Media, Libraries, and Web 2.0: How American Libraries are Using New Tools for Public Relations and to Attract New Users

May 22, 2009

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ABSTRACT

GERMAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE: Deutscher Bibliothekartag 2009 in Erfurt” (2nd to 5th of June 2009)

Many academic and public libraries in the United States have been embracing the use of Web 2.0 and Social Networking tools to enhance services to library patrons. Libraries have been progressively implementing a wide variety of these tools but many are concentrating their efforts on the use of blogs, open source content management systems such as Joomla and Drupal, social networks such as MySpace and Facebook, and many are also using Instant Messaging chat services such as Meebo to answer reference questions.

According to Wikipedia, “Social media are primarily Internet-based tools for sharing and discussing information among human beings. The term most often refers to activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and the construction of words, pictures, videos and audio. This interaction, and the manner in which information is presented, depends on the varied perspectives and "building" of shared meaning among communities, as people share their stories and experiences.” The private sector industries that use Web 2.0 tools for marketing and public relations should be closely studied by librarians. Fifty-seven percent of respondents to a research study, *New Media, New Influencers and Implications for Public Relations* by the Society for New Communications Research stated, “Social media tools are becoming more valuable to their activities as more customers and influencers use them.”

This research study includes a brief review of recent statistics about the use of these Web 2.0 tools, highlights the importance of why libraries need to understand how the private sector uses these tools, illustrates specific applications for their use in American academic and public libraries, and presents survey findings.

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Overview

According to Wikipedia, "Social media is information content created by people using highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies. At its most basic sense, social media is a shift in how people discover, read and share news, information and content. It's a fusion of sociology and technology, transforming monologue (one to many) into dialog (many to many) and is the democratization of information, transforming people from content readers into publishers. Social media has become extremely popular because it allows people to connect in the online world to form relationships for personal and business. Businesses also refer to social media as user-generated content (UGC) or consumer-generated media (CGM)." (Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media)

Additionally, "'Web 2.0'" refers to a perceived second generation of web development and design that facilitates communication, secure information sharing, interoperability, and collaboration on the World Wide Web. Web 2.0 concepts have led to the development and evolution of web-based communities, hosted services, and applications; such as social-networking sites, video-sharing sites, wikis, blogs, and folksonomies. The term Web 2.0 was first used in front of a large audience by Eric Knorr, executive editor of InfoWorld, in the December 2003 special issue of the business IT magazine *CIO*, with the title "Fast Forward 2010 - The Fate of IT", in his article "2004 - The Year of Web Services". (Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0)

In many cases, the terms Web 2.0 and social media are interchangeable and are widely used to describe the same concepts related to online communities and sharing online information and resources. While the term Web 2.0 refers to the actual applications available to Internet users, the term social media refers more broadly to the concepts of how these applications are used and the communities built online.

Questions, Fears, Frustrations and Concerns

Libraries in the United States have been employing many Web 2.0 applications to promote and market library services since their inception. Conversely, many libraries have feared this paradigm shift in communicating library services to their users because of traditionalist values and tend to cite an unsubstantiated fear of possible security breaches to their online systems and integrated library systems. I repeatedly hear from library staff members who want to employ Web 2.0 applications to reach a new population of potential library users that their library's administrators do not "believe in" or "are fearful of" using these online tools.

Many of the same questions are asked about the implementation of Web 2.0 applications in the library: “How can I convince my library administration of the usefulness?” “We are already understaffed and busy so how can we find the time to use these tools?” and the most general question, “Why should my library offer or even promote social media?” The answers to these questions are quite simple.

Libraries need to change and adapt to the needs of customers.

The best way to convince open-minded library administrators of the usefulness of social media is to point directly to patron input and user statistics. It is also important to look to the broad public relations and communications industry for answers to many of these questions. According to Gillin’s study, *New Media, New Influencers and Implications for Public Relations*, “Marketers and public relations professionals today are confronted with an astounding array of new communications channels. Internet-based social media tools like blogs, podcasts, online video and social networks are giving voice to the opinions of millions of consumers. While mainstream media continues to play a vital role in the dissemination of information, even these traditional channels are increasingly being influenced by online conversations. The ‘new influencers’ are beginning to tear at the fabric of marketing as it has existed for 100 years, giving rise to a new style of marketing that is characterized by conversation and community.” (Gillen 2008).

Library administrators first need to understand the general uses and benefits of social media for public relations and marketing. Many libraries rely on their history of traditional uses and do not feel the need to promote their services. However, in today’s society, libraries have been placed in a competitive market with bookstores that offer children’s story times, book discussion groups, and author talks, as well as cafes offering free Wi-Fi to customers. This clearly necessitates the need to employ social media tools to communicate the library’s mission more broadly.

When I educate library staff members about the importance of using social media tools, I usually point to the “In Plain English” series of videos on YouTube. This series, created by Lee LeFever at commoncraft, succinctly illustrates how social media and other related applications not only help communicate an organization’s message to current and potential customers, but also demonstrates their popularity and impact. (YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpIOCIX1jPE>).

The most common problems associated with library administrators’ inability to accept and use social media tools are lack of knowledge and fear of change. Through education and use of successful examples, many change their minds and begin slowly with implementing these tools through the use of blogs and Facebook Fan Pages, however, many libraries still do not see the value in social media leaving out many potential library users who use social media tools on a daily basis.

“The growing popularity of online social networking and video content is deepening web users’ engagement with the internet and is causing a dramatic shift in the global online landscape - both for consumers and for advertisers, according to a report from The Nielsen Company, which was distributed at the ad:tech conference in San Francisco. Nielsen’s research shows that since 2003, the interests of the

average online user have shifted significantly, evolving from use of “short-tail” portal-oriented browsing sites - such as shopping directories, guides and internet tools - to sites that contain more specialized “long-tail” content geared to specific and interactive user interests.” (Marketingcharts.com).

“This change is manifested by the fact that video and social networking sites are the two fastest growing categories in 2009, and will necessitate new ways of thinking about online marketing, Nielsen said.” (Marketingcharts.com). According to the Nielsen report, “The Global Online Media Landscape: Identifying opportunities in a challenging market,” the number of American users frequenting online video destinations has climbed 339% since 2003. The unique audience for online video surpassed that of email in November 2007. Additionally:

- Time spent on video sites has shot up almost 2,000% over the same period.
- In the past year, unique viewers of online video grew 10%, the number of streams grew 41%, the streams per user grew 27% and the total minutes engaged with online video grew 71%.
- There are 87% more online social media users now than in 2003, with 883% more time devoted to those sites.
- In the past year, time spent on social networking sites has surged 73%.” (April 2009).

Libraries in the U.S. are employing communications resources such as YouTube in growing numbers. Libraries such as Harper College Library in Palatine, Illinois (since December 2007), the Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana (since August 2006), the United States Library of Congress (since June 2007), and the South Carolina State Library (since October 2007) have been using YouTube and other similar online video social media tools to promote and document library services and events. YouTube, as well as many other social media tools, allow users to access detailed statistics on viewing demographics to track usage and gain insight from customers. Academic, public, and governmental libraries are seeing the benefits of using social media in various ways (see appendix for survey results/comments).

Potential Partnerships

Since libraries need to be more and more competitive with bookstores and other commercial entities, partnerships through social media with for-profit and other non-profit organizations may provide meaningful connections. According to the study, *Public Media 2.0: Dynamic, Engaged Publics*, “partnerships will permit public media 2.0 to happen across the social media landscape, building projects around the five C’s of choice, conversation, curation, creation, and collaboration.” (Clark, 2009). Many types of organizations now can communicate at random levels sharing information for each other as well as those interested in the services, products, and events offered by those organizations. Much of the news

media industry has been experiencing a paradigm shift to the more frequent use of social media tools and is reaching out to organizations such as libraries through the use of Facebook and Twitter. When setting up a Twitter feed for the South Carolina State Library, I was apprehensive of adding yet another social media tool to my growing number of useful communications outlets; however, because of its growing popularity, I moved forward and was surprised to find that the first two organizations to follow the library's feed were commercial news media outlets. Over a few months, the number of followers of the library's feed grew to over 100 individuals and news media organizations.

This newly found outlet for collaboration with the news media has placed the library in a different light, and progressively more library-related information is finding its way to the general public. Again, according to *Public Media 2.0*, "Institutions in the nonprofit sector that are strong partners for public media projects include universities, museums, and libraries, as well as issue-focused educational and social organizations." (Clark, 2009). Libraries should take advantage of the plentiful and freely accessible Web 2.0 tools to reach this growing and somewhat untapped area. Library administrators, who are concerned about the perceived overwhelming amount of duties their staff are already bombarded with on a daily basis, should take the time to look closely at those current duties and decide what functions to stop performing so that Web 2.0 tools may be incorporated into the work flow of library staff members. Library administrators need to address the growing importance of social media and Web 2.0 tools in today's society by reorganizing the flow of library operations. To put it bluntly, **libraries need to stop performing tasks that are no longer needed** and take on new tasks available through social media in order to promote, market, and transparently manage libraries in today's society. It is the library administrator's job to manage these changes and delegate how these changes should take place.

Survey

Between March 14 and March 21, 2009, I conducted an online survey of library staff titled, *Web 2.0 to Market and Promote Libraries in the U.S.* This online survey was promoted on my blog, *Libraries & Life* (<http://curtisrogers.blogspot.com>), and forwarded to email listservs such as PRTalk and the American Library Association's Chapter Relations Office listserv, as well as promoted on various other library-related blogs and Facebook in an attempt to reach a broad spectrum of library staff members across the country. The survey consisted of 10 questions (see appendix for complete survey results). Demographic questions asked if library staff members represented public, academic, governmental, special, or other library types; as well as the respondents' predominant library-specific job responsibilities such as public relations/marketing, administration/management, reference/research, technical services, children/youth services, or other.

In the areas of Web 2.0 use, the following types of questions were posed: Which types of Web 2.0 applications are used to promote and market library services; a perception-based question regarding how respondents rate each Web 2.0 tools' effectiveness toward achieving library marketing

campaign/promotion goals; if Web 2.0 tools are important for marketing and promoting library services; and for what various purposes are Web 2.0 tools used. Additionally, respondents were asked how likely they believe the people in various age brackets are influenced by the library's use of Web 2.0 tools; if the respondent has reported any success using such tools; and, which specific Web 2.0 applications are used by the respondent's library. A last, open-ended comment question was provided for any additional information not covered by the specific questions.

A total of 222 library staff members began the survey with 148 (66.7%) completing it. The largest group of respondents represents public libraries (49.1%) and academic libraries (36.2%). Respondents mostly reported they worked as library administrators/managers (31.7%) and reference/research librarians (31.2%). Only 13.3% of respondents represented library staff members whose main responsibility at work consisted of public relations, marketing, or communications.

Respondents then reported on which types of Web 2.0 applications their library uses to promote and market services. Overwhelmingly, blogs (70.7%), social networks (66.7%), and instant messaging (50.7%) are used the most. The least used applications are for newsgroups/forums (10.7%) and virtual worlds (4.0%). Respondents perceived that blogs, online video, and instant messaging ranked as the most effective tools for achieving their library's marketing campaign or promotion goals with virtual worlds again raking last. Additionally, the perception of age groups using Web 2.0 tools maintained that social media users are in the under 18 to 25 range, with 26 to 46 being next.

When respondents were asked if Web 2.0 tools are important for marketing and promoting library services, an overwhelming number stated yes (90.4%). Respondents were also able to comment on why they felt these tools are (or are not) important. Some respondents stated the tools offer more than just the traditional method of communication:

- *These are tools, and only tools. Just as we use radio, the newspaper, email, and such - we should also use these tools. I think of them as little feelers thrown out into our community, meant to bring users to our services. The higher the number of ways they can contact us, and places that we are visible, the more our services will impact the community. And that's what it's all about.*
- *The tools we use that are web 2.0 are just more tools to reach potential patrons for our library. We still use the traditional methods so that we're able to reach an extremely wide audience, regardless of their technological skills.*
- *Web 2.0 is where today's generation is living, working, studying. We need to incorporate these elements into our library services to meet the needs of our users.*

Additional responses to the comment portion of this question were mixed. Some respondents cited time constraints:

- *I think they can reach a specific niche market, it's just that we don't have a lot of time to really devote to the development of these tools. They are often an afterthought for us.*
- *Time to consistently attend to is the real issue.*

- *We just don't have the staff or time to do an effective job with these tools. Our Wiki is in-library only and doesn't reach patrons.*
- *We are still investigating the staff time necessary to participate in these online promotional methods.*
- *This is a qualified yes. These tools require a lot time, but will only reach a small percentage of patrons. Libraries have to determine the costs and benefits of actually using such tools.*

Unfortunately, one individual commented that social media sites are blocked at their library:

- *I believe that they would work very well in a large city, but in our rural, conservative area we are not using any of these. In fact, we have blocked both myspace and facebook within the last 6 months and blocked utube within the last year.*

Of the respondents using Web 2.0 tools, the top uses were for promoting general library services (79.0%), marketing specific adult programs and services (57.3%), reaching a new audience of potential users (53.8%) and providing quick updates to library users (53.1%). Twenty-six follow-up comments were made mostly by those not yet using Web 2.0 tools to promote library services:

- *Our library does not use Web 2.0 for marketing because of the marketing librarian's and the city's lack of understanding of Web 2.0*
- *still trying to get buy-in from admin to use these tools. One blog that has never had a hard launch still in test*
- *we need to look into this, but are not using*
- *Our administration has not yet embraced the technology*
- *we do not, we can not*

However, some responses to this question were positive and cited particular uses:

- *Awareness of library issues (especially budgets)*
- *Promote Government Documents!*
- *Virtual reference is growing*
- *Reach media/journalists with fresh information*
- *publish community info & connect to community*

Twenty-seven respondents completed the open-ended question asking if they have had success stories using Web 2.0 tools in their library. Below are selected responses which speak for themselves:

- *A user posted a complaint on Yelp for our library, along with a negative rating, due to a lack of knowledge that she could place holds on items. Our reply to her (publicly visible on Yelp) apologized and then listed how to access our holds services & other borrowing options, and highlighted a handful of other services people might not know about. That increased traffic to our profile on Yelp but also elicited a reply from that user who upped her rating of the library to the max*

of stars, and thanked us for replying. That is what using these tools is about - one-on-one connections that bring people to our services.

- Virtual reference has been used way more than I thought it would. Because you can be anonymous when you ask a question (using Meebo, anyway), people are more inclined to ask a question they may not want to attach their name or email to.*
- We had a teen book discussion on our Myspace site that was extremely successful.*
- When my teens started realizing that I was available online and through texting, they started to use those methods to keep in closer contact with me, to alert me to mistakes I made in the newsletter, to ask questions, to clarify things, and, I think, to just see me as a person, not just a librarian.*
- We used our blog to run a contest during national library week and the readership increased dramatically.*
- Our local media is one of our Twitter followers. When we post reminders about a program happening on the day of the event, if the media is available, they will send someone. It's been a great tool for us.*
- Yes, I've had numerous meebo IM chat reference sessions as well as a few with Facebook chat. Students rarely check their official e-mail accounts, so Facebook messaging has been a better communications tool.*

Respondents then selected specific Web 2.0 tools used in their libraries. Among the highest ranked were Facebook (71.4%), Flickr (49.6%) for photo sharing, blogging (47.4%), Twitter and Meebo (36.1%), and YouTube (35.3%). Twenty-one respondents commented on this question. Selected comments are:

- Our YA librarian started using MySpace but has never received much response from it; she now contacts mostly through e-mail. We just started experimenting with Twitter. We post event photos on our website through Flickr. Our Wiki is for library staff only*
- We hope to use Facebook. I use del.icio.us, LinkedIn and Facebook for professional purposes but not officially for the library.*
- We use instant messaging but only for reference questions. We have online video in our newsletter, but it isn't on youtube.*
- Difficult to sort out "official" Library use from sanctioned-but-independent use by library staff. Measurement of effectiveness seems impossible.*
- I use facebook, librarything, livejournal, Myspace and google talk myself for personal use. The system uses the above, more or less.*

Overall, the positive benefits of using Web 2.0 tools in libraries documented by respondents outweighed those of any negative responses. This could be due to many factors including how the survey was distributed and those who elected to respond since many responses came from those believing that social media has proven to be of great use in promoting the library's mission to new and unique library customers. Below are selected comments from the final open-ended comment question:

- *We're just starting, and I think the importance will build with time. I would like to change the format of the website to a Blog and get on Twitter next. An elderly woman contacted me recently on Facebook to try to figure out how to become a fan of the library's page. That was quite cute. There are actually quite a few "older" adults on Facebook.*
- *I have found that it's difficult to convince management that 2.0 tools can HELP our students. If they were to just walk around, they would see how many of our students are looking at Facebook and not doing homework.*
- *The major problem with getting libraries to use web 2.0 is with the directors and boards, neither of whom are early adopters. There is little system level leadership and no inducement at the branch level to use web 2.0 as no one wants the extra work.*
- *We cannot jump on every tool that comes our way. I think every Web 2.0 tool needs to go through an evaluation process before it is used in the library. Way too many librarians are eager to become Twopointopians and have adopted a leap before you look approach.*
- *We want to increase our use of Web 2.0 tools, but our big challenge is having no one on our staff who knows enough about them to impliment them. Hopefully we can correct this over the coming 1-2 years.*

Resources

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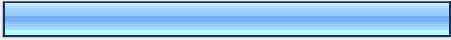




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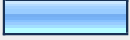
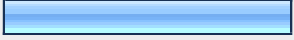
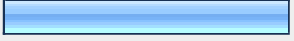


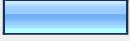
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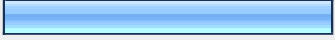
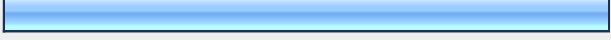

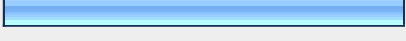
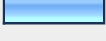
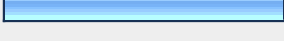
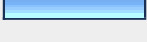
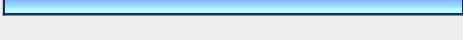

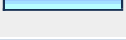
APPENDIX – Survey Questions with Responses

Web 2.0 to Market and Promote Libraries in the U.S.

1. I work at a			Response Percent	Response Count
Public Library			49.1%	107
Academic Library			36.2%	79
Governmental Library			4.1%	9
Special Library			3.7%	8
Other			6.9%	15
			answered question	218
			skipped question	4

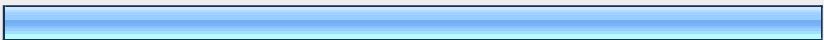

2. My main responsibility at work is			Response Percent	Response Count
PR/Marketing/Communications			13.3%	29
Library Administration/Management			31.7%	69
Reference/Research			31.2%	68
Technical Services			6.4%	14
Children/Youth Services			4.1%	9
Other			13.3%	29
			answered question	218
			skipped question	4


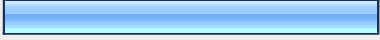

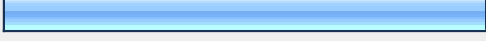
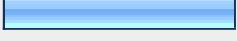
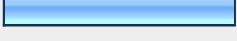
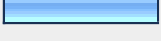
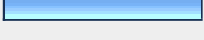
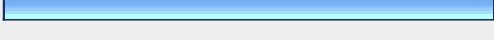
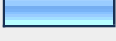
3. My library uses the following types of Web 2.0 applications to promote and market library services (check all that apply):

		Response Percent	Response Count
Blogs		70.7%	106
Online Video		36.0%	54
Social Networks		66.7%	100
Podcasting		17.3%	26
Photo Sharing		44.0%	66
Newsgroups/forums		10.7%	16
Wikis		30.7%	46
Social Bookmarking		15.3%	23
Instant Messaging		50.7%	76
Virtual Worlds		4.0%	6
Other		12.7%	19
		<i>answered question</i>	150
		<i>skipped question</i>	72

4. Please rate your perception of each tools' effectiveness toward achieving marketing campaign/promotion goals (1=not effective 5=very effective):

	1	2	3	4	5	Rating Average	Response Count
Blogs	9.9% (14)	22.0% (31)	23.4% (33)	29.1% (41)	15.6% (22)	3.18	141
Online Video	7.7% (9)	12.0% (14)	34.2% (40)	36.8% (43)	9.4% (11)	3.28	117
Social Networks	6.8% (9)	12.9% (17)	33.3% (44)	32.6% (43)	14.4% (19)	3.35	132
Podcasting	12.4% (12)	21.6% (21)	36.1% (35)	24.7% (24)	5.2% (5)	2.89	97
Photo Sharing	11.0% (13)	19.5% (23)	33.9% (40)	27.1% (32)	8.5% (10)	3.03	118
Newsgroups/forums	10.9% (10)	23.9% (22)	37.0% (34)	25.0% (23)	3.3% (3)	2.86	92
Wikis	14.0% (15)	24.3% (26)	38.3% (41)	22.4% (24)	0.9% (1)	2.72	107
Social Bookmarking	14.7% (14)	26.3% (25)	38.9% (37)	15.8% (15)	4.2% (4)	2.68	95
Instant Messaging	10.8% (13)	13.3% (16)	24.2% (29)	25.8% (31)	25.8% (31)	3.43	120
Virtual Worlds	43.0% (37)	20.9% (18)	27.9% (24)	4.7% (4)	3.5% (3)	2.05	86
	answered question						157
	skipped question						65

5. Do you think Web 2.0 tools are important for marketing and promoting library services?				
			Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		90.4%	150	
No		9.6%	16	
			Comments:	51
			answered question	166
			skipped question	56

6. What does your library use Web 2.0 tools for? (check all that apply)				
			Response Percent	Response Count
Marketing specific adult programs/services		57.3%	82	
Marketing specific children/youth services/programs		41.3%	59	
Promoting general library services		79.0%	113	
Provide quick updates to users		53.1%	76	
Issue press releases		25.2%	36	
Book discussions/groups		25.2%	36	
Friends of the Library information		16.8%	24	
Contests		21.7%	31	
Reach new audience of potential users		53.8%	77	
Other		11.9%	17	
			Other (please specify)	26
			answered question	143
			skipped question	79



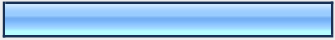





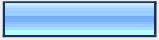


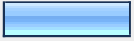



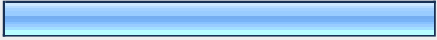
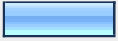

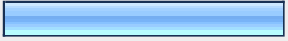

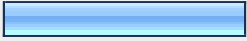
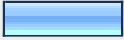
7. How likely do you believe the people in the following age brackets are influenced by the library's use of Web 2.0 tools? (1=not at all likely; 5=very likely)

	1	2	3	4	5	Rating Average	Response Count
under 18	5.7% (8)	6.4% (9)	22.1% (31)	27.9% (39)	37.9% (53)	3.86	140
18-25	2.8% (4)	4.2% (6)	13.4% (19)	29.6% (42)	50.0% (71)	4.20	142
26-35	2.9% (4)	6.5% (9)	18.0% (25)	50.4% (70)	22.3% (31)	3.83	139
36-45	4.4% (6)	15.3% (21)	33.6% (46)	40.1% (55)	6.6% (9)	3.29	137
46-55	9.5% (13)	34.3% (47)	42.3% (58)	11.7% (16)	2.2% (3)	2.63	137
56-65	28.1% (39)	43.9% (61)	23.0% (32)	3.6% (5)	1.4% (2)	2.06	139
over 65	53.6% (75)	30.0% (42)	13.6% (19)	2.1% (3)	0.7% (1)	1.66	140
	answered question						142
	skipped question						80

8. Have you had any success stories or 'aha' moments with using Web 2.0/social media tools (in relation to your library)? If so, please comment.

	Response Count
	27
	answered question
	27
	skipped question
	195

9. Which specific social media/Web 2.0 tools does your library use?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Myspace		27.1%	36
Facebook		71.4%	95
Twitter		36.1%	48
YouTube		35.3%	47
TeacherTube		0.0%	0
Vimeo		3.0%	4
Blip.tv		1.5%	2
Meebo		36.1%	48
AIM		17.3%	23
Yahoo IM		16.5%	22
MSN IM		18.0%	24
ICQ		2.3%	3
Podcasting/iTunes		13.5%	18
Flickr		49.6%	66
Picasa		7.5%	10
Snapfish		0.0%	0
Ning		3.8%	5
Blogging		47.4%	63
LinkedIn		12.0%	16
Second Life		5.3%	7
Wikis		30.8%	41
Slideshare		6.0%	8
del.icio.us		26.3%	35
Library Thing		12.8%	17
lib.rario.us		0.0%	0

	Other/Comments	21
	<i>answered question</i>	133
	<i>skipped question</i>	89

10. Thank you for taking time to complete this survey. The responses will be compiled and presented in a paper to be presented in June at the German Library Association annual conference in Erfurt, Germany. All responses are confidential. If you have any other comments about social networking/Web 2.0 tools in U.S. libraries, please feel free to add them here. If you have any additional questions, please contact Curtis Rogers at crogers@statelibrary.sc.gov. Thank you!

		Response Count
		12
	<i>answered question</i>	12
	<i>skipped question</i>	210