How we learned to stop worrying and love web 2.0

On Friday, 11 May 2007, five Library Assistants left Charles Sturt University Library as Acquisitions, Circulation, or Distance Education assistants, and returned to work on Monday morning as Library Officers in the new Information & Liaison Services Section.

An organisational restructure had created a number of exciting opportunities for us in this previously 'librarians-only' domain, and we were taking up positions in the redesigned section along with Information and Faculty Liaison Librarians, Team Leaders, Web Developers, and the Section Manager, many of whom were also new in their roles. The whole library was also adjusting to the new structure with the four functional groupings of Business Services, Development, Operations, and the Divisional Office.

We could write pages on how our information and reference skills developed, how we adjusted to a more autonomous self-directed style of working, and how the Information & Liaison Services Section accommodated us in our new roles. However, this article will focus not on the process of integration into a new team, but on the expanding use of technology in our work.

When we first started we had little thought of the role that technology would have not only in the work that we did, but also in helping us adapt to our new roles. Back then, the duty statement read like a foreign language to us, talking about wikis, blogs, and RSS feeds. Web editing, providing virtual frontline information assistance, and developing online resources were new and unfamiliar tasks for us.

We had been successful in our applications due to our experience and willingness to learn new skills, but most of us had little or no knowledge of the software and web 2.0 technologies we would be using in our work. Added to that, we were based at different campuses, which made it hard to support and learn from each other.

So how did we make our way? It helped that we were joined by two young digital natives who were recruited externally. Then face-to-face training in the software, Dreamweaver, for the web-editing component of our job gave us an early foothold. As well as being an opportunity to meet, go out to dinner, and get to know the each other, learning to use Dreamweaver was great for building our confidence and optimism about our positions. Along with a newfound support

network, we now had a valuable skill, and with a total revamp of the library website planned, there was the promise of lots of web editing work to come.

However, the plans to re-develop the library website involved us in more than web editing. Two thirds of the student population of Charles Sturt University study through Distance Education and a decision was made to end face-to-face classes for undergraduate students. Information Literacy training was to be made available online and embedded in the curricula. Preparation of online self-help resources in various media was needed, and so we became involved in creating podcasts using Audacity, and screen capture video tutorials using Camtasia and Captivate software.

With growing confidence in our ability to learn and use new software and applications, we then began to work with many of the other technologies and media used in the section. We have pretty much taken over the library's blog to post interesting news and resources, we use delicious bookmarks to add the latest resources and useful websites to the library's Subject Support pages, and we're starting to explore the microblogging tools, Twitter and Yammer.

This year saw Information & Liaison Services trial and implement a successful instant messaging service. The library officers were involved in all aspects of this, from participating in the project team and advising on the software to use, to being rostered to answer queries. Because we use the free, web-based software Meebo, only one staff member can be rostered at a time, and it is not unusual to be managing multiple reference queries at once. It is a sign of how much our confidence has improved and how our skills are respected that we work alongside the librarians in providing this service.

We have also learned to use Communicator, our internal instant messaging software, for many purposes. Its immediacy makes it the perfect work tool to liaise with other staff, ask a quick question, or to explain things, while its informality has also helped us feel much more connected. Using Communicator is almost as good as being together in person. In the same way, our desktop sharing software, Bridgit, has been invaluable in enabling us to work and learn together despite being based at different campuses.

So where are we now? These days we are all busy – there's always something interesting to do. Every day sees a wide variety of interactions with library users and other staff members and new technologies to explore and evaluate.

A willingness to engage with web 2.0 technology has been crucial to our development. In the end, it wasn't just about how much experience or knowledge we had of technology. All we really needed was a bit of confidence in our ability to learn and experiment.

Vanessa Salway
Team Leader, Information & Liaison Services
vsalway@csu.edu.au

Jeanette Day
Library Officer, Information & Liaison Services
jday@csu.edu.au