

RSS4Lib

RSS4Lib

11/2/2007 - 12/10/2007

<http://www.rss4lib.com>

When are we doing enough?

By Meredith Farkas
(Information Wants To Be Free)

Submitted at 12/1/2007 8:03:03 PM

Since I got to Norwich, my main priority has been to ensure that the distance learners have access to all the information they need to do research through the library. I have information all over the place about our resources and services. I've created screencast tutorials, HTML tutorials and FAQs. Some of the tutorials are recommended by the instructors and some are actually required components of the course. One tutorial is integrated into the general orientation for distance learners. The library presence itself is embedded in each and every WebCT classroom, and we have content that is targeted to each individual program. We have a news blog that is syndicated via RSS & JavaScript on every page with a subject database list (the pages that get the most hits) so they won't miss any important developments.

Last Winter, I started an embedded librarian program, because I felt that a lot of students were still missing the information I'd provided. I'm embedded in 14 online classrooms and in each of them, I have a discussion board where I can provide instruction and answer research questions at the point of need. I explain to them what resources are available and tell them about the tutorials in their subject area. In the

weeks before their paper topic proposal is due, I offer advice on choosing a topic and pre-research, and I offer to help anyone who's not sure if their topic is appropriate given the available resources. I tell people all the time about how we will e-mail them any journal article they need and will mail books to their home. In some classes, I get a lot of questions; in others, hardly any at all. And yet, at the end, I get feedback via end of semester surveys that some people couldn't figure out how to use the library. And I'm left to wonder why they didn't bother asking (if not on the discussion board, than at least via e-mail or phone).

So, when I receive feedback from students that makes it clear that they haven't looked at any of my instructions, I'm at a loss about what to do. One student who had been in a class I was embedded in last semester was shocked to discover that we could get him journal articles that we didn't have available online. And ILL is something I talk about on the discussion boards like a broken record. It was obvious he'd never bothered to look. I get feedback that people couldn't figure out who to contact for help or that they had to buy books because we didn't have what they wanted online. Don't get me wrong; sometimes people have legitimate criticisms that I can act on and am grateful for it. I'm happy to make changes. It's nice to be able to do something about it. I'm just not sure what I can do when I am making

all this information available and people simply are choosing not to look at it.

I would love to be able to stand in front of them and give them this information. I'd love to have the opportunity to work with them in a chat or a webcast, but the programs are strictly asynchronous since so many people work and are scattered all over the place. Barring that, I can only put the information in as many places as possible and constantly suggest to the faculty members that they recommend our services (which I do).

I'm never going to stop trying to make things better, but with some people you have to put up your hands and say "I've done enough." If you're not willing to look at tutorials, read documentation or contact us, I can't help you. The student has to take some responsibility for this failure. I can't make JSTOR easier to use, but I'm happy to teach you how to use it if you ask (or check out my tutorial on it). The majority of complaints we get are things we can't fix. I can't make the eBrary reader not suck. I can't make it so that every database has the same interface. All I can do is make myself as available to help as I can and provide documentation so they can help themselves. And if people aren't willing to ask for help or look at my instructions, then I can't beat myself up over it. When someone I remember talking to buys a book instead of requesting it through ILL as I'd suggested, I'm not

going to feel badly about it when he later complains. That's not true. I do feel bad. But I'm trying to recognize when things are beyond my (or the library's) control.

The feedback we get from the end of semester surveys has definitely gotten better over time, so I know we're doing a better job, but it seems there will always be those people who don't want to take responsibility for their own learning. If they can't figure something out, they won't look at the help page to find out who to contact. They won't look at the tutorial. It drives me crazy, because I wish there was something I could do to reach these people. And since they are geographically distant, I can't do much in the way of outreach (these folks are not of the online social networking generation by and large). I guess it's like the whole serenity prayer. I have to learn to accept that sometimes I won't be able to help people because I can't control their motivation. It's a two-way street. And I guess it makes more sense to focus on the things I can change. It made a huge difference when we started offering chat reference. It made a big difference when we started monitoring the library e-mail accounts all weekend. I could spend time continuing to wring my hands over the students who don't want my help or I could focus on doing a better job for those who do.

RSS4Lib Survey Results

By rss4lib@gmail.com (Ken Varnum) (RSS4Lib)

Submitted at 11/25/2007 11:31:26 AM

Thanks to the 137 of you who have taken the quick subscriber survey that I posted on November 8. Based on my best-guess estimate of my readership on this date, I had 1513 feed subscribers on November 7, the day before I launched the poll. This represents a respectable 9% response rate.

I asked three questions in the survey:• Do you subscribe to the RSS4Lib RSS feed?

- What tool were you using when you saw the post about this survey?
- Where did you first see the link to this survey?

Of people who took the survey in the first two weeks (7:15 AM EST November 8 - 7:15 AM EST November 22), 96.2% (127 of 132) respondents were subscribers. Interestingly, though not necessarily significant, two of the non-subscribers who took the survey in week 1; the other three did so in the week 2. Part way through week 3, all five of the additional surveys

submitted have been by subscribers. Of the five non-subscribers who took the survey in the first two weeks, three were at RSS4Lib when they saw the survey and two saw it linked in another blog.

Web-based aggregators are the clear favorite among respondents. Bloglines has a 43.9% share of the first two weeks' respondents (including eight users of Bloglines Beta). Next is Google Reader, with 42 users (31.8%). The numbers then dwindle dramatically, with five people reporting they use Sage Firefox extension and three or fewer using a variety of other tools.

Finally, I asked respondents where they saw the link to the survey. An overwhelming number of respondents (115, 87.1%) saw the survey link in RSS4Lib's RSS feed. Of the remaining 17 respondents, five noticed it on the RSS4Lib site, five at unspecified "other" or "don't know," and four others in various other blogs. From reviewing the referer logs and respondent comments, I note that two of the four came from the University of Michigan library's "superfeed" of library and librarian blogs and two

others came from blogrolls at other sites.

I also captured the user agent (the way the web browser or application identifies itself to the web server). Firefox is the browser of choice for two thirds (88 of 132) respondents, followed at 30.3% (40 of 132 respondents) by a mix of tools that don't identify themselves, followed finally by Safari (2 respondents), Internet Explorer (1), and Vienna (1). Mac users, by the way, account for 17.3% of respondents whose user agent identified itself, with Windows users making up the remaining 82.7% (only two user agent's identified themselves as being Vista).

I've been interested to see the 'long tail' of survey respondents. More than half -- 58.3% -- of respondents took the survey on the day I posted it (November 8). Responses have dwindled to fewer than 10 on all days after that, but even now, more than two weeks after its appearance, one or two subscribers are still taking it a day.

EBSCO and RSS Alerts

By rss4lib@gmail.com (Ken Varnum) (RSS4Lib)

Submitted at 12/5/2007 8:13:03 AM

Paul Pival learned something interesting about EBSCO, EZProxy, and RSS feeds: if you don't edit your EZProxy configuration just so, RSS alerts for saved searches in EBSCO databases get rewritten to pass through your library's proxy server. And if that happens, off-campus users (including aggregators like Bloglines or Google Reader) can't get to the RSS feed. (The link to each new item from the database in the feed is still routed through your proxy server so your patrons can still get to the full text at a single click.)

See the Distant Librarian for instructions. In short, all that's needed is adding a single line to Useful Utilities' standard EBSCO EZProxy configuration:

NeverProxy rss.ebscohost.com

I suppose other databases require similar proxy configuration changes. If you have examples, leave them in the comments.

Building Academic Library 2.0 video

By Meredith Farkas
(Information Wants To Be Free)

Submitted at 11/26/2007 11:31:16 AM

I've been offline for a while, so I didn't notice that UC Berkeley put the webcast of my keynote online! WOW! It's available on YouTube, but you can also download the podcast from UC Berkeley's site if you're not into the whole video thing. I'm embedding the YouTube video here. I start talking about 12 or 13 minutes in (there are some introductory remarks from the muckety mucks at UC). I'd love to hear what you think of my ideas — I don't claim to have all the answers about library 2.0 or how organizations should be structured to get there — or to read your own ideas on these topics. "Library 2.0 is all about conversation — there's no RIGHT or WRONG (at least that's my take).

This is the first time I've ever seen a video of one of my talks. Other than the fact that I move back and forth

way too much, it was actually better than I thought it would be. I'm not perfect — I say um and like and sometimes go off on tangents — but hopefully my enthusiasm makes up for it. Considering how much I used to tremble and sweat (think Albert Brooks in Broadcast News) when I gave a talk in front of even a few people, I consider this a very good job.

Since last Tuesday, I've been in South Florida visiting family and some ducks I've been hanging out with for years (I have this bizarre love for ducks that has existed for as long as I can remember). This is one of the first times that I've gone away and actually stayed away from the computer for most of the time. I don't fly home until tomorrow, but I gave myself this day to kind of ease myself back to reality. Must admit, being out of the loop for a week was nice. Thanksgiving isn't a big thing in my family. We were never much for traditions and stuff, but we do the whole stuff-yourselves-with-food thing. This year, though, I really

started thinking about what I'm thankful for. I realize that my life has already exceeded my expectations. I've accomplished so many things that I never thought I'd do in 60 years, much less 30. I've made great friends, both online and off. I've had incredible mentors. I married someone who may not be perfect in every way, but is definitely perfect for me. I can pay my bills every month. I've become much more confident in myself (two years ago I couldn't even imagine giving a keynote!!!). Like everyone else, my life isn't perfect. We all have things we'd like to change about ourselves or our surroundings. I wish I were a better writer. I wish I was one of those people who actually enjoys exercising. I wish I could get by on 5 or 6 hours of sleep. I wish I didn't get headaches so often. But when I look at what I'd imagined my life would be like versus what it is like, I definitely came out ahead. Maybe it's just low expectations. Whatever it is, I'll take it.

Bloggers for Peer-Reviewed Research Reporting

By rss4lib@gmail.com (Ken Varnum) (RSS4Lib)

Submitted at 11/2/2007 8:33:18 AM

There is a movement afoot to encourage and support "serious" blogging in science. Bloggers for Peer-Reviewed Research Reporting [BPR3] is a group of scientists who have made a step in this direction by releasing a set of icons that scientists are invited to include in their blog posts when "they're making a serious post about peer-reviewed research." BPR3 is an initial effort to encourage scientists to identify their commentary on peer-reviewed research articles -- whether the article is online or in print -- with an icon. The next step, according to BPR3's web site, is "to use bpr3.org to aggregate all the posts discussing peer-reviewed research from across the disciplines." If this effort succeeds it could well open up new doors to scholarly debate and discussion.

Why does this matter? Well, as was first brought to my attention at the ASIS&T panel discussion on Opening Science to All: Implications of Blogs and Wikis for Social and Scholarly Scientific Communication, there is a great deal of communication, debate, and discussion of scientific research within the blogosphere. However, unlike letters to the editor in peer-reviewed journals, there is no standard method to capture, collect, or forum for evaluating the opinions of blogging scientists. To the extent that research -- and discussion of research -- moves into the public sphere, there is a great opportunity for the scientific community to add to and discuss research as it happens. [Via The Medium is the Message.]

Casual Conversations

By Meredith Farkas
(Information Wants To Be Free)

Submitted at 11/30/2007 8:23:16 AM

A week from today, I'll be taking part in a new project Tom Peters (of OPAL fame) has put together called Casual Conversations. From what he's told me, it sounds like it will be a Charlie Rose-style interview (in a web conference format) where we chat about our work/stuff that we're seeing in the profession (or tech world) that excites us, etc. It think it will be really interesting, because it's the casual conversations I have with people I admire in the profession that I find most illuminating.

Here's the info:

Friday, December 7, 2007 beginning at 2:00 p.m. Eastern Time, 1:00 Central, noon Mountain, 11:00 a.m. Pacific, and 7:00 p.m. GMT/UTC/Zulu:

A Casual Conversation with Meredith Farkas

Meredith Farkas is the Distance

Learning Librarian at Norwich University in Vermont. She also blogs at Information Wants To Be Free. Her book, Social Software in Libraries, was published by Information Today earlier in 2007. She also writes a column for American Libraries, was one of the organizers of the online course, Five Weeks to a Social Library, as is known by some as the Library Queen of Wikis.

This online conversation can be accessed in various ways through the following URL:
<http://www.conference321.com/mastadmin/room.asp?id=rs1641902f62b4>
The Casual Conversations series is designed to be up-close and personal from a respectable online distance. While there are many conferences (in-person, online, and in-world) where librarians can hear leaders in the field make formal presentations about interesting projects, there are few opportunities to hear these same leaders discuss informally what they currently are working on, their future

plans and goals, the challenges and opportunities facing librarianship, their personal pet peeves, etc. This afternoon, at 2pm ET/1pm CT, Tom will be interviewing Aaron Schmidt, someone I think a great deal of, both as a person and as a librarian/techie. If you're interested, and you should be, his conversation can be accessed from the same URL above.

Here are the rest of the upcoming conversations:

Friday, Jan. 18, 2008: Curtis Rogers
Friday, Feb. 8, 2008: Lori Bell
Friday, Feb. 15, 2008: Michelle Boule
Friday, March 28, 2008: Marshall Breeding
Friday, April 11, 2008: Jenny Levine
Friday, May 16, 2008: Stephen Abram
Friday, June 6, 2008: Michael Stephens
Looks like a great project and I look forward to listening to many of these. Thanks Tom!

My talks at the ILN Conference in Dubai

By jessamyn (librarian.net)

Submitted at 12/8/2007 8:07:13 PM

So yesterday was the big day. A keynote talk, a Q&A session, and two blog/wiki workshops at the Information Literacy Network Conference in Dubai, UAE. I've been feeling, before this trip, that I was going someplace really different compared to places I've been before. I've never travelled out of the country on my own before (except to Canada) and I've never been to the Middle East before. I have a friend, Step, who lives out here, so its been a great chance to see a place through the eyes of someone who lives here, not just out a hotel window. My pictures are

on Flickr though since Flickr is sort of blocked here it's been a bit of a challenge getting them all uploaded. The absolute weirdest thing about this trip so far is the number of people here who I wasn't expecting to know, or who knew me. The director of the Zayed University library and I served on an ALA committee together. Two people at the conference had seen me speak before — one in California and one in Perth Australia. Another two people had attended the same conferences that I had been to. One woman grew up in a small Australian town I had driven though in March. One woman owns a house literally five miles from my own house in Bethel. Another participant had

grown up in Vermont. Keep in mind that this is a tiny conference with just over 100 registrants.

So, I gave a talk on Library 2.0 technologies which is an interesting thing to do when some of my favorite technologies — Flickr, Twitter — are actually blocked at a country level and so are completely unavailable to these librarians and educators. During my workshop we actually got to mess around with a locally installed version of Wordpress and a locally installed version of Mediawiki. It was tough to do a bit blog/wiki workshop in just under an hour but one of the neat parts was that for a workshop of 40 or so people, we had 20 wired laptops available so that people could

actually use the software, not just hear about it.

So, the two notes pages from my talks are here

- Library 2.0 - using buzzwords to help people
- Blog & Wiki workshop

If you've seen my other 2.0 talks, this is a slightly different version with a little more background and links to more handouts. Thanks so much to the nice people who brought me out here. I'll be heading back to the conference today just to sit in and maybe take a few photos.

Asking for help from the hive (on mobile devices)

By Meredith Farkas
(Information Wants To Be Free)

Submitted at 11/18/2007 9:34:12 AM

I often have people asking me questions about mobile devices. They assume that because I'm tech-savvy about social software, I must also have one of those PDA Smart Phones and do lots of text messaging and whatnot. This could not be further from the truth. I've had the same junky, no-frills phone for over four years, and it has finally gotten to the point where I can't hear the person on the other end of the phone unless I put them on speaker phone. This means I have to look for a new phone.

Ever since I saw a woman typing onto her PDA with a small external bluetooth keyboard at Computers in Libraries in 2006, I have fantasized about doing the same. I'm small and not particularly strong, and I get really tired carrying around my 15-inch laptop all day. It would rock to

just carry a PDA and do all my note-taking on there. I love the idea of being able to browse the web over a cell phone connection and being able to send text messages when I'm at conferences (now, when people txt me, I usually call them back because it takes too long to form the words). I also never remember to take photos because I always forget to take my camera with me. If I could get a phone with a pretty decent camera, I'd have all of this stuff in one device and I'd probably be better about documenting my life, keeping in touch with people, etc. So, I am asking your advice on what mobile device you think I should get. I can only get a phone through AT&T/Cingular, which limits my choices a bit. I was looking at the iPhone and the Samsung Blackjack so far. The iPhone is out of contention because it cannot work with a bluetooth keyboard (which seems like the dumbest thing ever given that it's touch keyboard is really hard to use — I tried Jessamyn's last night). The

Blackjack definitely looks promising and my friend seems pretty happy with his. So here are the criteria I'm most interested in:

- Connect to the web through the cell phone network (we don't have much wifi up here)
- Be able to work with a bluetooth keyboard
- Pretty decent camera (for a phone — I'm not expecting 5 megapixels or anything!)
- Good battery life

A nice form factor would also be a plus, but those four above are the deal-breakers for me.

Any advice would be much appreciated. I know some of you are probably laughing at me because you've had this stuff for the past x years and I sound like some yokel from the mountains in Vermont (oh wait, I am!).

Thanks in advance for your help!

Going to Midwinter after all

By Meredith Farkas
(Information Wants To Be Free)

Submitted at 12/5/2007 12:11:51 PM

A few weeks ago, I wrote a post on how I was probably not going to ALA Midwinter due to the high cost of travel to attend two meetings. Well, it looks like I will be going after all. I have been asked to cover the exhibit hall for American Libraries, taking over for Andrew Pace who is moving on to do amazing things at OCLC. Boy is OCLC lucky to have a guy like Andrew. Soon they'll have collected all of the cool people in our field!

I feel like I'm an odd choice to cover new products and vendor goings on, since I know comparatively little about that world. I'm more focused on social tools and the databases in my subject area. But maybe it's a

good thing. I'll be looking at this world with fresh eyes; with fewer preconceived notions (well, I've got a few). I definitely plan on reading everything Marshall Breeding, Roy Tennant and Andrew Pace have written re:vendors in the past 5 years, so hopefully I won't go in a totally clueless n00b. It's also funny that I'll be writing this since I never get taken seriously by vendors (although, I swear, I've never worn a cat sweater in my life!). They think I look too young to have any power (purchasing or otherwise) and either because of that or because I'm female, they tend to talk down to me about tech stuff. Vendors really want their latest and greatest stuff mentioned in this article, so they will all want a piece of the person writing this. It'll be fun to bust into that old boys club; bring on the cigars and cognac!

Thanks to editor extraordinaire Leonard Kniffel for the opportunity, and thanks particularly to the amazing Andrew Pace, without whose faith in me, I certainly wouldn't be doing this. Andrew was really good at covering the vendor happenings without making it all sound dry, and if I can do even half as well as he did, I'll consider it a triumph. I have to say, I'll miss having his work next to mine in the magazine.

My flight is booked. I still don't have a hotel room, though I'm on the pending list through ALA (has anyone gone on there before? What are the odds I'll actually get a room this way?). This will be my very first Midwinter, and I'm definitely excited! I'll be pretty busy with the exhibits and my meetings, but is there anything I absolutely shouldn't miss this time around?

Waiter, There's a Diacritic in My Feed

By rss4lib@gmail.com (Ken Varnum) (RSS4Lib)

Submitted at 11/29/2007 5:38:00 AM

How to best encode characters with diacritics in your RSS feed? That was the question posed in a thread on Web4Lib recently, started by a librarian working putting his new books list into an RSS feed. (A great idea in itself, of course.) Since many books, especially in an academic library, but also in other libraries with user communities speaking diverse languages, this is important -- you want to be able to show the title properly, especially to speakers of the language for whom you've bought the book.

There are, of course, several ways to

encode many diacritic marks (HTML character entities and Unicode, for example); finding the best one for RSS engendered some discussion. The consensus in the discussion was that using character references is the best solution, particularly for the item title, which is arguably the most important part of an RSS item to get right (OK, the URL is also critical). If users cannot understand the title, why would they click to the full text? Character references take the form The numbers refer to the actual character; "402" is a f or "florin"; "247" is a ÷ or division symbol. And so on... For a list of common character references, see this entities table.

ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom is 40 years old today

By jessamyn (librarian.net)

Submitted at 12/1/2007 2:43:30 PM

Happy Birthday OIF! I will be teaching a half-day continuing education seminar at Simmons on Intellectual Freedom and I have been digging through their extensive website for primary documentation and remembering just how extensive and excellent it is. Intellectual freedom principles were one of the major things that brought me to librarianship and THE thing responsible for my sticking with it. I am proud of the work the ALA does to support intellectual freedom, though the challenges are still coming far too quickly for my tastes and I worry about ALA's ability to keep up with IF topics in a digital world that they still don't seem to quite understand. One of the things I do on Wikipedia is keep the Library Bill of Rights free from soapboxing and point-of-view hectoring. It's a tougher job than you might think.

can you spot the library?

By jessamyn (librarian.net)

Submitted at 12/1/2007 10:43:59 AM

A few nifty book-oriented and awesome library facades. And for a few more links to fill this out, here's a great old photo of Fred Bullock, a librarian at the Cardiff Public Library, c. 1900 and a link to the award-winning Kansas City design (from 2005) with some detail about how the project was actually conceived and managed. My favorite part is the jury comment for the competition This project celebrates books, reading, and the city in a joyfully direct and legible manner. The lovingly rendered level of detail at a massive scale brings the books to life, transforming these modest, familiar objects into monuments infused with hope and possibility. The result may be the world's most humane and enjoyable parking structure. [libact]

the future of reading, Amazon.com's then and now statements

By jessamyn (librarian.net)

Submitted at 12/4/2007 7:04:41 PM

I learned what I know about greasemonkey and an awful lot about accessibility by reading Mark Pilgrim's Dive Into Accessibility and Dive Into Greasemonkey. He has a blog at DiveIntoMark, of course, which I sometimes read. Today I was directed there by David Weinberger

The future of books that no one is reading.

By jessamyn (librarian.net)

Submitted at 12/2/2007 7:44:40 AM

BLDGBLOG, a true gem of original content about buildings and land use and culture, has a long lovely post on the future warehouse of unwanted

books. Starting with a description of the British Library's giant new warehouse, it goes on to talk about other text repositories from histories real and imagined. Are these warehouses libraries?

Quick Survey: Where Do You Read RSS4Lib

By rss4lib@gmail.com (Ken Varnum) (RSS4Lib)

Submitted at 11/8/2007 4:15:00 AM

I'm working on an article about blog readership via RSS and would like your help. If you have a few minutes, please fill out this three-question brief survey. Thanks!

Central Library Re-Opening

By Steven (Library Stuff)

Submitted at 12/9/2007 8:23:39 PM

Indianapolis' Central Library re-opened today - A Flickr Set.

Academic Librarians and Graphic Novels

By Steven (Library Stuff)

Submitted at 12/10/2007 6:26:21 AM

Academic Librarians and Graphic Novels

The Other Library Man

By Steven (Library Stuff)

Submitted at 12/10/2007 6:36:32 AM

A Q&A with the other Library Man.
Not this one.

Was?

By Steven (Library Stuff)

Submitted at 12/9/2007 7:05:00 PM

Was "Netflix for Books" Really Necessary?