

Paper presented on April 20, 2009 during the ARLIS/NA Annual Conference session titled: Integrating Resources Through Collaborative Convergence by Elizabeth Schaub, eschaub@uts.cc.utexas.edu

Web 2.0 computing has enabled a broad range of interactivity driven by user participation. In order to harness the power generated by user engagement, in spring 2008, Karen Holt, a School of Information graduate student at The University of Texas at Austin, researched and assessed Web 2.0 applications with an eye towards their applicability to the Visual Resources Collection I manage in the School of Architecture (henceforth I will refer to the Visual Resources Collection as the VRC). Her efforts resulted in a Marketing Plan that includes recommended Web 2.0 applications and a timeline outlining immediate, middle range and long term adoption of appropriate technologies. Since you will be making an initial investment of time implementing Web 2.0 applications, and, to varying degrees, investing additional time maintaining those applications once implemented, it is important to assess how each of the applications supports your collection's mission, goals and objectives. Each of the Web 2.0 applications recommended in our Marketing Plan is clearly aligned with at least one of the goals outlined in our collection's Strategic Plan. If you do not have a strategic plan, it might be a good idea to begin to think about creating one. This exercise will help focus your decisions as you weigh the pros and cons of implementing and maintaining Web 2.0 applications to promote your resources and services, engage your users and leverage the

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collective wisdom of your user base to help enhance the experience of others who utilize your offerings. During this presentation I will be discussing the VRC's implementation of a customized search engine called swiki, a Flickr Group, a blog called Deep Focus and a wiki that we use to manage information internally within the VRC.

In May 2008 we implemented a customized search engine called swiki, available for free from Eurekster, on the [VRC's Web Resources page](#). Our Web Resources page contains categories of links that point to content related to subjects taught in the School of Architecture as well as broad categories such as "maps" and "search tools." This list of annotated links has grown since its inception and continues to grow; as of April 2, 2009 our cumulative list of links numbers 229. The swiki allows for a federated search of up to 50 of these selected sites so that when one enters a search term, the links provided in the swiki are searched first before the search engine goes out to the wider Web to find relevant content. Swiki's features include the ability for users to rank search results, comment on the search and e-mail the search to a friend. As the swiki administrator one can create a tag cloud (Eurekster calls it a buzz cloud) of suggested search terms and you can customize the look and feel so you can brand it as your own. Further, it's a widget that your users can add to their

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blog, Web site or as a search box on their toolbar. In fact, you can add our swiki to your own resource unit's Web site or blog. From the VRC's Web Resources page simply click on the "[Grab this swiki](#)" link. This link will take you to Eurekster's site where you will find information about how to add our swiki to your site. Instructions are specific for the platform you choose, such as a basic HTML page, blog or iGoogle page. Simply choose your publishing platform from the list of tabbed options and follow the instructions. The level of ongoing maintenance required for the swiki is minimal to none. Once you've built your swiki you can, on a regular or not so regular basis, edit your list of 50 URLs and manage your buzz cloud by adding, deleting or blocking keywords. Additionally, as I mentioned, you can change how the swiki looks and feels if at some point you want to rebrand it.

By now most of us are very familiar with the online photo management and sharing application Flickr. In fall 2008 the VRC created a [Flickr Group](#)—for free—to enable School of Architecture faculty, students and staff to associate the images they upload to their own Flickr accounts with the school's group on Flickr. The VRC moderates the group but this is very informal; we do not actively police content so once we established The University of Texas School of Architecture Group most of our work was done. We do encourage

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contributors to tag their images extensively to increase their discovery. We have promoted the group via e-mail, our blog Deep Focus, word-of-mouth and posters displayed prominently throughout the school. It is fast and easy to create a Flickr group. In order to create a group you will need to establish a Yahoo ID. Once you've done this you can create an account on Flickr and then from there, establish a group associated with your resource unit. Anyone who wants to associate their images with your group will need to establish a Flickr account as well. Since a lot of people are already using Flickr to manage their photos this should not pose a stumbling block for participation in your group. Creating this Flickr group and advertising it as a service provided by the VRC was a very easy way to raise the VRC's profile among customers and to help encourage relationship building and increased access to user generated content. On a related note, I also think that the Flickr Group has the potential to drive collection development partnerships between contributors and the VRC.

A Web log, popularly know as a blog, can be a powerful relationship building tool facilitating constant communication between you and your customers through timely posts and user comments. A blog is something that, ideally, gets updated on a daily basis; when your customers subscribe to

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and/or visit your blog the expectation is that they will find fresh content.

However, this might not be feasible given your other work obligations, and the fact that we typically work five and not seven days a week. It's critical to find ways to keep the blog fresh without feeling overly taxed. In the summer of 2008 when I first started our blog, [Deep Focus](#), I set an objective for myself to post something new at least three times a week. This worked well until the fall semester began and I found that I had less time to devote to blogging. It was then that I trained graduate student Joan Winter to blog and she has since posted the majority of the entries on Deep Focus. I have subsequently given authoring permission to two additional graduate students and in doing so, I've spread the responsibility around so that this task does not fall on any one person.

One aspect of blogging that I thought would be overwhelming, in addition to the time required to produce the volume of posts that is ideal in order to make the blog timely, was the idea that I'd constantly need to come up with something interesting to blog about. In order to overcome this potential barrier you will need to plug yourself into content generating engines, like other blogs or listservs, that will point to resources that you in turn wish to feature on your blog. For example, I subscribe to the VRA, ARLIS and IMAG-L

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listservs, Librarian in Black and Very Short List. And, one of my graduate assistants, Joan Winter who I just mentioned, charged with blogging searches for relevant links in delicious. When she finds a site that seems relevant, she'll also look at other sites the user has tagged to decide whether to blog about them.

If you offer a blog you will also want to provide an RSS feed so that your customers won't have to remember to go to your blog. Instead new content will come to them. This is an important feature since you don't want to rely on your customers to remember to check your blog on a regular basis and then try to figure out what is new since their last visit.

There are a number of free weblog publishing tools like Blogger from Google and the open source software script called WordPress. WordPress offers a service on their WordPress.com site that allows you to get started with a free WordPress-based blog but is not as flexible as the version of WordPress you download and install yourself from the WordPress.org site. The VRC's blog Deep Focus uses the version of WordPress that requires that you have a server that supports PHP, a widely used general purpose scripting language that is especially suited for Web development, and MySQL, a relational database management system. We worked with the School of Architecture's Webmaster

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who downloaded WordPress and, with our input he created the look and feel, also known as the theme, of our blog. However, by using [Google's Blogger](#) or the hosted version of the WordPress blog, it's just a matter of signing up, coming up with a snappy name, choosing a theme and voila you've got a blog! Just remember, it takes time and effort to keep your blog vibrant so plan accordingly.

Web 2.0 technologies can also be used internally to support the smooth operation of your unit. For example, the VRC uses a wiki, called [PmWiki](#), to make accessible everything from our cataloging manual to our staff phone list. PmWiki is a free open source system for collaborative creation and maintenance of Web sites. PmWiki requires a server that supports PHP. Again, we worked with the School of Architecture's Webmaster who installed PmWiki for us. However, there are free versions of wikis, such as [ProjectForum](#), that you can run on your own computer and connect to via any standard Web browser.

Several staff members have been given permission to edit the VRC's wiki. By allowing staff members the ability to edit pages, our operation has a great deal of flexibility as far as documentation goes. As suggestions are made, I can ask a student to create a page on the wiki so that the entire staff

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can benefit. We have used the wiki to document workflow processes such as the one we follow when creating our biannual exhibits, both physical and virtual. For example, one student had been charged with this task for a number of semesters. As she was approaching graduation, I asked her to provide extensive documentation about her workflow process so that the next student charged with the task would have a model to follow. Once we established the wiki we posted the information she provided and the students who have subsequently been charged with producing exhibit materials have been able to easily update these wiki pages as our workflow has evolved.

The dawn of Web 2.0 has given us the opportunity to connect and engage with our customers in new ways by using technologies such as the customizable search engine swiki, blogs, and Flickr Groups. Further, we can harness the collective wisdom of our fellow colleagues and student employees by implementing a wiki. My hope is that you've been inspired to investigate some of the technologies I've discussed and assess whether it makes sense to employ them to support your respective unit's mission, goals and objectives at your home institution.

Thank you.