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Open Content and Open Events: Professional Development in an Amplified World

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Abstract: *Whilst the importance of open access to scholarly content is widely appreciated, difficulties in changing established practices and agreeing on new business models provide barriers to greater provision of open scholarly content. However content which is created by librarians and information professionals need not be affected by issues such as publisher agreements, business models for peer-reviewing, etc. There is therefore an opportunity for those involved in the provision of library services to be pro-active in allowing content developed within the organisation to be made freely available for reuse by others.*

Training and user support materials provide one area in which a willingness to share resources should provide benefits to those working in the public sector in particular, in light of the significant reductions in funding we are currently seeing. In addition to conventional text-based resources the widespread availability of mobile devices and the growing ubiquity of WiFi networks are making it possible to share access to live events or to record such events and make recordings freely available to others.

This paper provides a summary of recent experiences in the provision of amplified events in order to maximise access to events and the ideas discussed at events. We are now starting to see such events move beyond experimentation by early adopters and the provision of an event amplification infrastructure becoming increasingly by professionals who are seeking ways of developing their professional skills beyond traditional physical attendance at events.

The paper describes how the librarian's role in sharing access to knowledge and resources can develop into sharing knowledge and expertise with peers across the sector by being willing to be active content providers in amplified events.

1. Background

In a paper on "*Let's Free IT Support Materials!*" [1] Kelly *et al* suggested that service departments in higher education should be pro-active in using liberal licence conditions which will permit user support materials to be freely used by others. The paper, published in 2005, suggested that Creative Commons appeared to provide the licencing framework which would allow resources to be freely shared and reused by other. That time, however, saw a period of growth and investment within higher education and there were no compelling drivers to resource resources developed by others. However the period of investment across the sector is now over and it appears unlikely that we will see a report to previous levels of funding in the near future. There now appears to be compelling reasons for sharing resources which have been developed within public sector organisations and for which there are no copyright complications which is often seen as a barrier to the provision of open access research papers.

2. Amplified Events

An early example of the use of networked technologies to enhance conferences was described by Kelly *et al* in a paper on "*Using Networked Technologies To Support Conferences*" [2]. The paper reported on several examples of ways in which online technologies were beginning to be used at conferences and similar events, including use of messaging technologies such as IRC or Jabber to support discussions, Skype to allow remote participants to listen to talks and use of slidesharing services such as Slideshare to enable remote participants to easily view slides used by speakers.

In an article which described use of WiFi technologies at the WWW 2003 conference [3] Shabajee highlighted areas of concerns:

> There are potentially negative aspects of using these technologies for delegates as well as speakers. In some sessions at Budapest, about 10 per cent of the audience had laptops - one person was heard to say that the noise of tapping keyboards drowned the speaker out at the back of the room. And it can be very distracting having someone typing quickly and reading beside you, rather than watching the speaker.

and went on to add that:

> It is probable that the speakers will find it hardest to adjust. It may be disconcerting to know that members of your audience are, as you speak, using the web to look at your CV, past work and checking any data that seems a bit dubious, seeing what other experts in the field believe, even probing those throwaway anecdotes for veracity. Add to that the knowledge that they are actively talking about you and your presentation, and the nerves can amplify.

but concluded on an optimistic note:

> *On balance, I believe that these technologies are likely to be beneficial. The added possibilities for collective learning and analysis, comprehensive notes with insights and links, often far more extensive than the speaker might have, are advantages previously unimaginable. Perhaps the richest potential lies in the interaction between members of the audience, particularly if you believe that learning and the generation of knowledge are active, engaging and social processes.*

By 2007 exploitation of WiFi networks at events was being noted by others. The term "amplified conference" was coined by Dempsey to describe "how more conferences are amplifying their effect through a variety of network tools and collateral communications" [4]. Four years later, in March 2011 Dempsey commented on how the term "*has been used in UK Higher Education where there is rich support for development and awareness activities through several shared services*" [5].

3.   A Toolkit For Providing An Event Amplification Service

We have seen a move from the provision of amplified events by early adopters in technology-focussed events to an expectation that an event amplification infrastructure will be in place to support professional development for those who are not able to attend events. The move to a service provision for amplified events has seen the development of a niche market for specialist who can provide support for organisers wishing to offer event amplification for remote audiences who may "work with event organisers to provide live blogging, live video streaming, event reporting and remote audience support" [6]

In addition to financial benefits which can be gained by enabling participation in conferences and other events by those who may not otherwise be able to attend, amplified events may also provide environmental benefits by avoiding unnecessary travel. The JISC-funded Greening Events II project [7] is providing advice on best practices for organising amplified events. A key deliverable for the project will be:

> *An Events Planning Toolkit to help event organisers think through what type of event they need to hold (physical, virtual or hybrid) and then to provide assistance in the form of guidelines and technology tools with each stage in the process to enable them to reduce the negative sustainability impacts of their event.*

The toolkit is based on the following template.

> **Purpose(s)**: Document the intended purpose(s) of the event amplification. This should also include a summary of the main beneficiaries (which could be the local audience, remote participants, speakers, etc.).

> **Technologies Used**: Describe the technologies which will be used to support the purposes described above

> **Resources**: Describe the additional resources which will be needed to provide the event amplification.

> **Risk assessment**: Provide a risk assessment associated with the provision of the event amplification service.

> **Evaluation**: Describe how you will evaluate the effectiveness of the event amplification.

> **Metrics**: Describe the metrics you intent to collect in order to provide quantitative evidence of use of (and possibly value of) the event amplification.

4.   A Bottom-Up Approach to Amplified Events

UKOLN, the national centre of expertise in digital information management based at the University of Bath has a well-established tradition of organising seminars which provide an opportunity for UKOLN members of staff to keep up-to-date with developments across the information management environment. As described on the UK Web Focus blog [9] in January 2011 a decision was made to open up access to the seminars:

> *As part of a culture of openness and maximising access to valuable resources we aim to open up access to UKOLN seminars more widely in the future. The seminars will normally be open to all members of staff at the University of Bath. In addition we will also seek to record and possibly live stream the seminars, provided the speakers are happy with this and the technical infrastructure and support is available. Note that as we appreciate that speakers may be reluctant for their talks to be recorded as it could, for example, inhibit discussions we do not intend to pressurise speakers into allowing their talks to be made publicly available.*

Subsequent seminars on "*Website Design – Down with Technicalities, Up with the User and Crawler*" [10], "*Resources from Andrew Treloar's Seminar on Data Management*" [11] and "*UKOLN Seminar On OER Open to All*" [12] were streamed live and, were possible, the seminar resources made publically available afterwards. This approach has initially made use of a variety of technologies including various video streaming services (e.g. UStream, Qik and Bambuser) and hardware devices (iPod Touch, Android Phone and Macintosh with attached webcam) in order to gain experiences of the strengths and weaknesses of the various tools which are available.

In addition a similar approach was taken for a seminar on "*Mobile Technologies: Why Library Staff Should be Interested*" which given to Library staff at the University of Bath. The talk was also streamed live and a recording of the talk published afterwards in order that members of staff who were not able to attend the seminar could access the resources at a later date.

It should be noted that at the time of writing (October 2011) there have been 164 views of the video recording which is hosted on the Bambuser service [13].

5. Conclusions

The current economic climate is forcing librarians and other information professionals working in the public sector to revisit ways of working more effectively. The growing ubiquity of WiFi networks and the provision of a variety of online services which are available free-of-charge or at low cost provide opportunities which can help those working across the sector to share staff development content and expertise in ways that would not have been easily achieved a few years ago.

References

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