

# Still Facing Obstacles to Web 2.0 Use by Your Library? Try Henrico's Approach

by *Deborah Lammers*

Some say it is easier to beg forgiveness than to ask permission. Many libraries, however, are part of larger organizations that may not appreciate this approach regarding the library's Internet presence. In mid-2009, when the Henrico County Public Library (HCPL) was ready to venture into Web 2.0 tools such as Facebook, Flickr, and Twitter, we knew our county administration might have some concerns. Library headquarters formed a small committee to develop a presentation for the county manager that would address potential problems and concerns in advance and explain the importance of Web 2.0 for libraries. Many public libraries were already far ahead of us, and we wanted to remain relevant to tech-savvy library members while avoiding falling farther behind. Our successful approach could be adapted easily by libraries of all kinds whose governing bodies may still have similar concerns, even two years later.

The presentation committee consisted of Jerry McKenna, library director; Christine Campbell, assistant library director; Barbara Weedman, public services administrator; Deborah Lammers, Dumbarton Area library manager; and Matt Phillips, emerging technologies librarian. In 2008, Lammers and Phillips were part of a committee that developed self-guided Web 2.0

training for library staff, adapted from the successful Learning 2.0<sup>1</sup> program created by Helene Blowers at the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library. All full-time HCPL staff and many part-time staff completed this training by spring 2009. At that time, McKenna formed this presentation committee and made plans to present our request to the county manager, Virgil Hazelett, in November 2009.

On presentation day, McKenna stated our goals and demonstrated that Web 2.0 fits well with the county and library mission statements. Our goals were to provide an overview of Web 2.0, explore a few of its tools, explain their applicability and value in libraries, share other localities' and agencies' use of Web 2.0, proactively address risks and legal protections, answer any questions, and gain permission to proceed. Library use of Web 2.0 would support the county's mission statement, in which "the county accepts the challenges of our changing social, physical, and economic environments by serving in an efficient manner, with pride and concern for the present and excitement for the future." In fact, we called the presentation "Web 2.0 and Libraries...excited about our future!" Web 2.0 use would also support the library's mission statement: "We deliver excellent customer service through access to a variety of materials, in-

novative technologies, and attractive facilities.... We anticipate and respond to the needs of a diverse community."

Next, Lammers provided a brief overview and definition of Web 2.0, showing how much things had changed since the early days of the World Wide Web. For emphasis, she showed the White House website from 1997, which seemed high-tech at the time, but looks very simple compared to today's websites. She discussed how web software evolved over time, mentioning sites like Blogger, Wikipedia, MySpace, Flickr, YouTube, and Google Maps and what made them new and different. She provided a definition of Web 2.0, including words and phrases such as *read/write, remix and reuse, dynamic, participation, and sharing*.

Phillips followed with a more in-depth discussion of a handful of Web 2.0 tools to demonstrate how other public libraries were using them and to suggest ways

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*Deborah Lammers serves as manager of the Dumbarton Area Library, part of the Henrico County Public Library system. She has been there for five years. She earned her MS in information science from the University of Tennessee in 1996 and worked at the Pamunkey Regional Library and the Chesterfield County Public Library before coming to Henrico.*

HCPL might do so. He explained Facebook, showed the Topeka-Shawnee County Public Library Facebook page, and suggested that HCPL might use this tool to promote library events and services while connecting with some of the 240,000 people in the Richmond area who were already members. Next, he discussed Twitter and showed how the Roanoke County Public Library had used it, with sample “tweets.” He suggested that HCPL might use Twitter for promoting library events, announcing new material arrivals, and sharing urgent information such as last-minute library closings. Phillips then discussed blogs and demonstrated the Williamsburg Regional Library’s site, “Blogging for a Good Book,” which provides a fresh book review each day. HCPL might also use a blog for reader’s advisory or to showcase projects like the Glen Allen Library renovation, which was underway at the time. Finally, he discussed Flickr and showed the photo collections compiled by the City of Roanoke Public Library. HCPL might use Flickr to share the progress of the Glen Allen renovation and photos of smiling faces from library events. This segment of the presentation clearly showed that many public libraries were already using Web 2.0 tools successfully.

Weedman continued building our case by discussing why public libraries were using Web 2.0 and why HCPL would like to begin. She pointed out that Web 2.0 provides easy marketing and promotion that is fast, dynamic, and free. In addition, Web 2.0 provides a “virtual library” outside of our walls; we can be where the patrons already are, on Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr. Library users have increasingly high expectations about their experiences on the web. If their bank, grocery store, and bookstore are on Facebook, they expect us to be there, too. Also,

due to the inclusive, participatory nature of Web 2.0, it can help create a feeling of community among the library and its users. We can reach them in many ways, and they can communicate with us in many ways. Along those lines, Web 2.0 allows an immediate feedback loop. If a family attends a library program, Mom can go home and post a quick message on our Facebook page with praise or suggestions for improvement. Web 2.0 is an effective way to reach out to teens and encourage them to participate by creating book reviews

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and sharing their opinions. It provides a powerful means to reach both library users and nonusers. If a family publication “re-tweets” a library message on Twitter, we reach hundreds of additional citizens. Weedman closed by displaying a long list of Virginia public libraries that we knew were using Web 2.0 at the time.

We tried to anticipate possible objections to Web 2.0 use, and Campbell provided an overview of ways in which the library, and the county, could minimize risk. There are some protections inherent in the Web 2.0 tools themselves. All of the tools that allow user input would allow us to review and approve content before it is posted to our sites. All of the tools are opt-in. Citizens must choose to participate and can control access to their personal content. We are not forcing anyone to use Twitter or Facebook, for example, and will continue to

communicate with them in traditional ways. Finally, Web 2.0 tools have acceptable use policies and provide ways for users to report abuse.

Campbell also discussed five new and existing policies and procedures that would protect the library and the county. First, the bottom section of all HCPL webpages links to a standard Website Disclaimer<sup>2</sup> that states we are not responsible for information beyond our own site. Second, to strengthen this, we proposed adding a short message that would display briefly when users clicked on an external link. Campbell showed an example of this on the Fairfax County Public Library website, and we developed a similar message shortly after the presentation: “You are now leaving the official website of the Henrico County Public Library, Virginia. When you exit this site, you are no longer protected by our privacy policy. Henrico County, Virginia, does not endorse nor is responsible for the content provided by outside websites.” Third, we knew an important area of concern would be the public’s ability to add comments to library Web 2.0 sites. The Fairfax County Public Library also had a public comment policy, which Campbell showed as an example. Since then, we developed our own comment policy,<sup>3</sup> which states that we will review all public comments prior to posting and explains our guidelines for exclusion. Fourth, we proposed that one library staff member would be responsible for reviewing and responding to customer comments initially to minimize risk. Finally, we believed the county’s existing Computer and Other Information Systems Use Policy<sup>4</sup> for staff already protected the county from potential employee abuse of computer resources, including Web 2.0 sites. Why reinvent the wheel? We acknowledged that there are risks associated with Web 2.0 use

and suggested ways in which the county could be protected from harm.

Earlier, we showed how and why many public libraries were using Web 2.0. Campbell further emphasized the popularity of Web 2.0 by showing examples from all levels of government, including localities such as Chesterfield County, the City of Richmond, Roanoke County, James City County, Arlington County, and Fairfax County. At the state level, she showed that the Commonwealth of Virginia was already using RSS feeds, Twitter, Facebook, podcasts, YouTube, and more. Finally, she showed examples of Web 2.0 use by the United States government and even the White House. By now, we had shown that many libraries and government agencies were successfully using Web 2.0, and that what we were asking was not something unusual.

McKenna wrapped up the presentation by revisiting our goals, taking questions, and asking for permission to proceed with Web 2.0 projects. He also offered to have library staff help inform other county agencies about Web 2.0 if needed, offering additional presentations and the use of the self-guided training mentioned earlier.

We did not expect an immediate answer from the county manager; however, we left with permission to proceed if we addressed his concerns, and with the caveat that there would be no additional funding or staffing to support this. Not surprisingly, Hazelett's concerns focused on minimizing risk and ensuring that we would continue to provide excellent customer service to the citizens of Henrico County. He had one concern we had not anticipated: How would we ensure that staff members represented the county appropriately when communicating through these tools? For example, what if

someone had an ax to grind and had the ability to post to Facebook on behalf of the library. Could that employee make the county look bad? Could we prevent that?

To address the county manager's concerns fully, we worked with the county legal department and wrote a social media policy that would guide the library's use of Web 2.0. The policy includes guidelines for employees who use Web 2.0 tools on behalf of the library. It states that "management of social media tools will be centralized at library administration. Only library em-

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ployees authorized by the library's Public Services administrator or Community Liaison Office may use social media websites approved by the library director or his/her designee(s) to conduct library business." Further, "the library's use of social media must adhere to the highest ethical standards in representing the county to the public. Authorized employees must comply with all county and library policies and procedures." The social media policy spells out the comment policy mentioned earlier and affirms that we will comply with all applicable laws.

An additional benefit of this process is that the library became a recognized, valuable resource for Web 2.0 information within the county. That initial presentation in November 2009 was so successful, we were asked to repeat it for all deputy county managers, many department heads, and at least two entire departments. We presented about Web 2.0 approximately a dozen times, and interest among county employees continues. Most recently, we delivered an abbrevi-

ated version of the presentation for the county Human Resources Department on November 7, 2011.

If your library still faces obstacles to Web 2.0 use, consider taking your case to the decision-makers, using our approach as a guide. Asking permission in a formal way worked well for us. By anticipating and addressing possible concerns about Web 2.0 in advance, we were able to move forward. The research and discussions involved in this process helped us develop appropriate policies and procedures in advance, rather than react to negative situations that might occur in the future. What about the lack of additional funding? We got creative and converted an existing librarian position into a new emerging technologies librarian position. Smaller libraries may not need a whole position. We know there are still libraries of all kinds in Virginia that are not using Web 2.0 tools, and we hope our approach will be helpful to them. We would be happy to share additional information with Virginia libraries on request.

#### Notes

1. Helene Blowers, "Learning 2.0," Charlotte Mecklenburg Library, May 15, 2007, <http://plcmc.learning.blogspot.com/>.
2. Henrico County Public Library, "Website Disclaimer," Henrico County Public Library, <http://www.henricolibrary.org/disclaimer.html>.
3. Henrico County Public Library, "Comment Policy," Welcome to Your Henrico County Public Library, <http://henricolibrary.wordpress.com/comment-policy/>.
4. Henrico County, "Computer and Other Information Systems Use Policy," Henrico County Rules and Regulations, <http://www.co.henrico.va.us/hr/regs/regs.pdf#1407>. **vi**