

Case Study: Developing library staff digital literacies through social media and face-to-face workshops

Subject area

The focus of this work was the development of digital literacies in library staff, in particular Subject Librarians with an established role developing information literacies in academic staff and students.

Scope and context

The Digidol project team worked closely with Subject Librarians to identify effective and sustainable approaches to raising the awareness and encouraging the development of digital literacies in all library staff. The aim was to help librarians to incorporate useful digital practices into their existing role so that they would then be able to facilitate the development of both information and digital literacies in an integrated way for academic staff and students.

Rationale and aims

The purpose of this work was to identify and establish a sustainable mechanism and process for promoting and encouraging the development of digital literacies amongst library services staff. The intention was to move beyond occasional presentations and workshops to a form of engagement that would work continually to inform and involve staff in new opportunities for using digital technologies. Ideally, if successful, this method would be scaled up to create opportunities for professional services staff throughout the university.

Digital literacies addressed

Video production workshop

A workshop on quick and simple ways of recording and editing video using smartphones and tablets, which was designed and developed in direct response to the requests of staff. Information and resources about the proposed workshop were uploaded to the Connections community in advance of the hands-on practical workshops. These were run at different geographical locations and different times to enable as many staff as possible to participate. Additional workshops have been requested, such as the identification, manage and sharing images suitable for presentation, for example effective use of Picassa, Flickr and Pinterest.

Additional Connections Communities

Separate dedicated communities have been setup to share advice and information about screencasting, podcasting and mobile apps. These are open to all university staff and as a direct outcome of conversations that have taken place in the online community have resulted several informal face-to-face gatherings where experience and practical help and advice have been shared.

In some instances this is just foundational, with the aim of increasing awareness of what is available and how it is being used by others. In addition, tailored sessions have been created to give staff the opportunity for a more detailed exploration of a specific digital technology, e.g., presentation tools and practices, the use of mobile devices for a specific purpose, such as video production.

Exposure to a broad range of internal and external digital technologies are their significance for enabling new and improved ways of working. There has been widespread adoption of Twitter to promote and inform staff and students about library services, which has been a tremendous success.

Social Media Workshop

The all day workshop on social media for Library staff attracted approximately 40 staff from across all the university libraries. It involved a number of highly interactive and participative sessions that encouraged staff to explore their personal issues and concerns about adopting social media for work and for personal use. Feedback on the day was very positive and also had the added bonus of stimulating use of the Connections Community.

Library Social Media Forum

Library Social Media Forum has given staff an opportunity to share experiences about their use of digital technologies. This are being run repeatedly across the campus at different dates and times to allow as many to participate as possible. Providing hands-on practical sessions with digital devices and applications, for example exploring the use of mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablet computers to record, edit and share video recordings. Information and resources were made available through Connections and the Knowledge Hub.

iPad Trial

Two iPads were purchased by the project to allow library staff to trial using them in the work place. This was in response to librarians reporting that they were being asked by academics and students who were already using these technologies for help and advice. So far, feedback from library staff is mixed with some finding the iPad an indispensable tool, whilst others really struggle

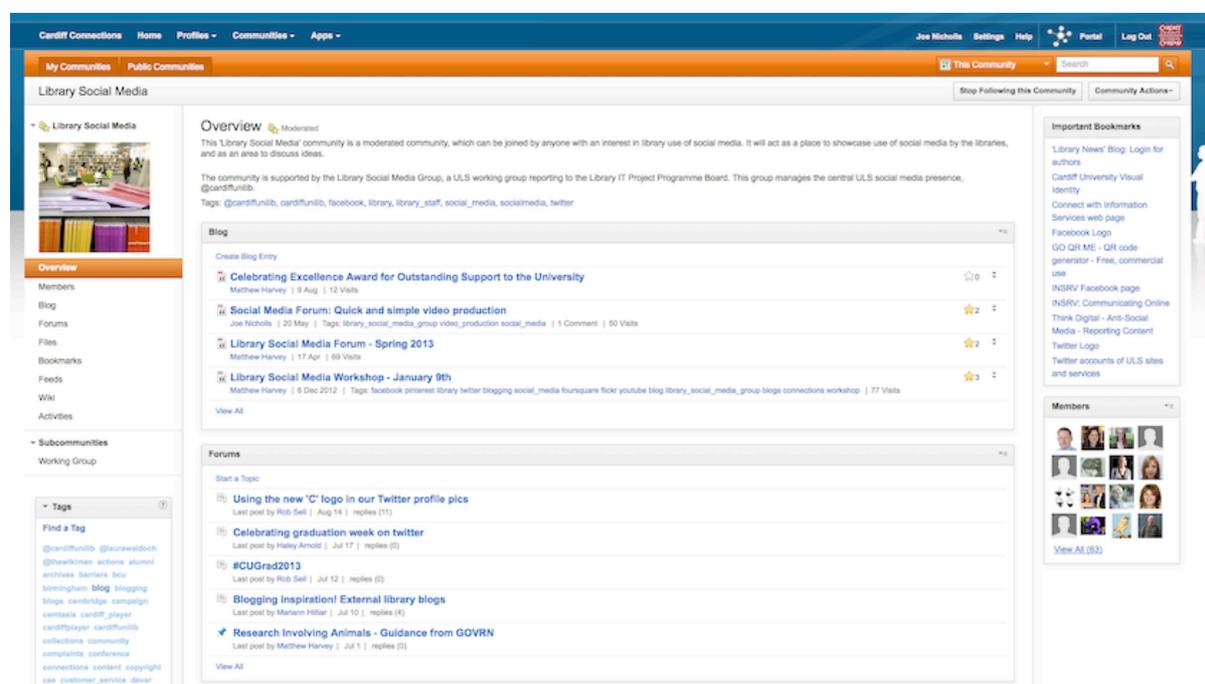
Case Study - Library Social Media Forum

to adopt it and blend its use in a seamless way with their working practices. It currently seems tablet computers will not necessarily be useful for all librarian roles.

Using Activities in Connections for meetings

Connections Activities (a task and workflow utility) is being trialed to organise and manage some library meetings. The tool has the potential to enable people to run more action-focused meetings. Participants use laptops or tablets devices to interact and record notes directly into the activity and associate 'ToDos' can be created and assigned to people. Homepages in Connections update to inform people of their tasks which they can then add comments and files to.

Overview



The screenshot displays the IBM Connections interface for the 'Library Social Media' community. The page is titled 'Overview' and is moderated. It provides information about the community's purpose and support. The main content area is divided into two sections: 'Blog' and 'Forums'. The 'Blog' section lists several entries, including 'Celebrating Excellence Award for Outstanding Support to the University' and 'Social Media Forum: Quick and simple video production'. The 'Forums' section lists topics such as 'Using the new 'C' logo in our Twitter profile pics' and 'Celebrating graduation week on twitter'. The right sidebar contains 'Important Bookmarks' and 'Members'.

IBM Connections* is an internal social media platform available to any member of staff (academic and non-academic) via their normal network login. Although similar to, but different in purpose, from Facebook and LinkedIn, it provides a broad collection of digital tools: blogs, discussion forums, bookmarking, file upload/storage, RSS/new feeds, wikis, task planning/management, media gallery and ideation blogs, within a Community space. Closed, moderated and open communities can be set up to provide an online environment where staff can engage in a variety of digital practices of potential value to their work. It has proven to be a very useful way for staff to share and collaborate, especially when located remotely from one another.

Case Study - Library Social Media Forum

A few librarians have set up community space to explore the role of social media in the context of library services; referred to as the 'Library Social Media' community. This has provided librarians with a forum to share information, ask questions and explore social media in the context of their work. It has now been active for well over a year, with contributions and discussions continuing to be productive and useful. Since the forum is visible and open to all university staff, it has resulted in people external to library services registering and participating in the Community. To date 63 people have become members.

The approach has enabled many more library staff to become informed and consider potentially relevant digital practices. Connections has provided a place where the potential of technology to support different ways of working can be explored and discussed. The community provides a stable and safe online environment for staff to explore and try out different kinds of social media tools for sharing information, communicating and collaborating. The discussion forums are used to ask librarians about the kinds of technology enabled work activities they feel it would be useful to develop.

Other staff development sessions that use of Connections has helped to take place include sessions on presenting, mobile technologies, video production, screencasting, podcasting, Twitter and blogging, many of which are now being employed to good effect to promote library services. These in turn have spawned online communities dedicated to exploring these specific digital practices. The public nature of these community spaces (visible to all university staff) has resulted in non-library staff signing up and participating in workshops. This suggests that the approach has real potential for bringing people with different roles and interests together.

In advance of participating in training/education sessions, people have been consulted and invited to feed into their content and design. A good example of this occurring was library staff involvement in the development of an all day workshop on the use of social media in library services.

Although frequency of contribution and participation in the community fluctuates, regular input from a few enthusiastic individuals ensures that it continues to serve a useful purpose. Many library staff report occasionally going to the space to explore what is going on but not contributing themselves. There are likely many factors that influence when and how people interact with such tools, having the confidence to do so being one that is commonly mentioned.

This particular Connections community, on Library Social Media, has definitely helped to stimulate interest in this area across the libraries. It is has

Case Study - Library Social Media Forum

played a part in encouraging librarians to adopt Connections elsewhere in their work. A number of distinct library related community spaces have been set up to facilitate collaborative work on other topics/issues. For example, a community dedicated to the work of Subject Librarians, an eBooks Group, Reference Management software, Electronic Journals, and a Library Technology Group.

Digital resources and know how used

- IBM Connections social media environment (detailed above)
- Mobile devices (Smartphones and Tablet Devices) and applications.
- Screencasting using Camtasia.
- Podcasting using Audacity.
- Video production using iMovie and MS Moviemaker.
- Blogging using Wordpress and Blogger
- Microblogging using Twitter
- Presenting using Powerpoint, Prezi, Flickr Slideshow and Concept mapping tools.
- Bookmarking using Delicious, Diigo, Pinterest and Scoop.it

Benefits and impacts

Over the duration of the project there has been a noticeable increase in number of library staff discussing and making use of digital technologies, in particular social media tools.

More library staff are now presenting and running workshops to introduce academic staff and students to digital technologies and digital practices, with workshops being run through the University's Graduate Centre. These include sessions on social media for researchers, presenting for Cardiff Award Students, mobile applications using for search, reference management and bibliographic databases.

The current attitude of librarians towards developing their digital literacy can collectively be best described as cautiously receptive. They are taking informed and managed steps towards embracing new technologies and are continually re-assessing their role in helping others to do likewise. Significant concerns remain about the additional demands placed on the librarian role and some resistance remains towards what is considered by some to be the responsibility and role of staff more directly involved with IT.

Conclusions and lessons learned

At the start of the Digidol project Library staff, and in particular Subject Librarians, were recognised as a group receptive and willing to engage with digital literacy. Having already established working practices for promoting and teaching information literacy many librarians were ready and willing to embrace digital literacy as an integrated aspect of their work and their teaching. In fact, some had never considered there to be a distinction and were comfortable working with the more encompassing term 'learning literacies'.

However, attitudes and enthusiasm to use technology vary greatly. Discussions have raised significant concerns about how roles, responsibilities and workloads are being stretched to accommodate the growing demand for technology related enablement. This is clearly an area that still requires careful management of the changes taking place. It is safe to say that there are more librarians who are receptive to making better use of technology for their own purposes, than there are responding to the growing demand on them to enable others to do likewise.

As is common with many staff development sessions, not just those targeting librarians, more people tend to register their interest than actually turn up and get involved. In an attempt to improve this, more effort is being given to consulting people in advance of running the event and where possible involve people in determining the content and format of the learning activities.

Links to further information

*IBM Connections - <http://www-03.ibm.com/software/products/us/en/conn/>

Connections has been installed at Cardiff University as an internal only social media platform (<https://connections.cf.ac.uk/>). This means that the Library Social Media Community is only viewable and accessible to university staff.

Further opportunities

It is encouraging that library staff continue to make use of the Library Social Media community and participation in other Connections Communities also continues to grow slowly. This indicates that there is a real possibility that conversations about technology and associated digital practices can be sustained. What we need to be able to find out is how many library staff visit these communities and how often they do so. More work is required to understand what factors dissuade and encourage participation.

Case Study - Library Social Media Forum

Learning from the experience of running meetings through Connections Activities the intention is to replicate this elsewhere for other Library meetings and also in IT services, before promoting the approach elsewhere. The challenge is getting staff sufficiently engaged and motivated to sustain the practice. This will require those who control and manage the meetings to be comfortable with the approach and encourage participation.

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