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Library Technology Conference 2010 – Macalester College, MN
http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/libtech_conf/2010/program_overview/

On March 17-18, about 400 participants met to share and learn about current trends in technology for libraries. There was a variety of sessions to choose from that included both theory and practice.

The program began with a keynote address by Michael Porter from Web Junction, looking at technology from the lens of the library. Things are changing and technology is growing rapidly. With that in mind, Michael encouraged everyone to try things that “one finds interesting.” He stressed the importance of making time to try and play with technologies. Libraries are made up of both content and community. With ubiquitous computing, which is embedded, personal, adaptive, and context aware, libraries have the opportunity to use this environment to share content and create community.

Michael stressed that is also important for libraries to create infrastructures that supply content. This means all types of content not just books since content is now also in electronic format, which is becoming a new dominant format. For libraries to maintain the position as the place to go for information, we need to figure out how to “circulate” electronic content better than anyone else. Electronic content can also be used to create community.

After lunch Michael again spoke and addressed ideas about social networking communities. The one thing I took away was the demands of being involved in community building environments, such as Twitter. You need to devote time to monitoring, posting, etc. that meets the expectations of the social community. This is what the culture demands.

After the opening session, I attended a session on using Google where I was given the “tour de France” of many familiar Google application but I also learned about QR (quick response) codes. QR codes are like a barcode that can be read by electronic devices and they allow you to embed content in the code so you can have it link to a map, to the catalog, auto-dial to the reference desk, contain contact information, etc. There is software that you can install in handheld devices, including cell phones that have a camera, that allow you to take a picture of the QR code and it will translate it into the embedded content. This was actually used in a conference I attended the following weekend to allow participants to automatically add contact information into their smart phones by taking a picture of the QR code on another participant’s nametag. No one had to hand out his or her business card. Libraries are just beginning to scratch the surface of QR codes’ potential uses.

Next, I attended an unexpected session called “Mobile Reference.” I went to the session with a pre-conceived notion that it would be about using mobile devices when doing reference, but I was wrong. The session talked about the success of

taking reference services out of the library and going to where patrons are, in public spaces and on their “turf”. This is not a new concept since there is an ARL Spec Kit (285), <http://www.arl.org/bm~doc/spec285web.pdf>, *Library Services in Non-Library Spaces*, which can be used as a guide to this type of project. One mobile location that was particularly successful was in the career center where librarians target students who need help researching companies that they are scheduling interviews with. This presentation also gave one a sense of the necessary buy-in of the staff that does this, tips to make it successful, and the benefit it can be to marketing overall library services.

A session on free multimedia tools presented an array of free or low cost online environments that allow you to quickly and easily develop multimedia content. Have you ever heard of Prezi (<http://prezi.com>) for presentations, Screentoaster (<http://screentoaster.com>) for screen capture, Animoto (<http://animoto.com/education>) for audio/video, VoiceThread (<http://voicethread.com>) for audio on your PowerPoint, Jaycutt (<http://jaycutt.com>) or Motionbox (<http://motionbox.com>) for video editing? These are just some of the free or low cost online products available. Other top tools for learning are at ToolsZone (<http://c4lpt.co.uk/recommended/index.html>).

The second day started with more practical sessions; an introduction to iMovie, using SharePoint, and integrating the library into Blackboard courses. It was interesting to hear how SharePoint was used by one library to manage files and, since it is also a database, how it was used as a knowledge base and for collecting reference statistics. After lunch there was a general session by Anne Zarinnia, Associate Professor at the University of Wisconsin. Unfortunately the quality of the sound system in the gymnasium made it difficult to hear much of what she was talking about. However, she incorporated video clips of Sugata Mitra’s “Hole in the Wall” experiments about how children given access to a computer taught themselves <http://www.hole-in-the-wall.com/> which I was able to access after the conference. I wonder if there might be something we can glean from these findings as we look at ways to help patrons learn to use technology. The speaker also stressed that it is time for “a view of a new librarianship, one focused on knowledge and action instead of artifacts and collections.”

The day ended with a “lightning round” of topics. Presentations included repeats of hi-tech ideas such as using Yahoo Pipes for aggregating and filtering content to feed to a site by RSS. One presentation stood out not because it was hi-tech but because it was very practical. A presenter described how to use old technology with new, for example, how you can connect your iPod to an old stereo system instead of using ear-buds. With tight budgets, can we give some old technology a second life?

Overall, it was a very worthwhile conference. I left with a lot of tips and tools to try but also a lot of things to think about as we deal with the rapid change of technology. There are some excellent session handouts available on the Macalester College Digital Commons website.