## Taking it to the streets – emergingtechnologies@Murdoch

In 2007 Murdoch University Library's Emerging Technologies Specialist, Kathryn Greenhill, introduced library staff to the *23 Things*, a selection of web 2.0 tools. Staff explored these tools and considered the impact they were having on libraries and library services by completing a new *Thing* each week and then reflecting on it in their blogs.

In 2009 Kathryn worked with the university's teaching and learning staff to offer a similar program for the wider university community as part of the Academic Work Matters workshops (*http://www. tlc.murdoch.edu.au/asd/docs/workmatters.html*). This program, titled 'Web 2.0: Easier, faster, friendlier', covered 14 *Thing*s and was offered over 6 weeks from mid June to late July.

Participants could enroll in one or more of the weekly one-and-a-half hour sessions, or attend the two intensive half-day sessions. The response to the program was overwhelming, with sessions booked out within days. About 60 participants enrolled, some for just one or two sessions and some for more. At the end of the program 17 people had attended every workshop in the series. Participants at the half-day sessions were asked both before and after these workshops how they currently felt about each *Thing*. The responses showed that familiarity and confidence with the *Things* increased. Participants indicated that they would be now more likely to use research tools like Zotero and LibX. Self-reported competence and confidence increased in all areas, even those like web-based email where staff had presumed that participants would be already competent.

Written feedback was extremely positive about the usefulness of the course content, enjoyment of the classes and competence of the staff presenters. Several participants felt that the course should be offered again.

Feedback from participating library staff showed that the program raised the profile of the library as a place to learn about technology, improved team teaching skills and technology teaching skills for library staff involved, improved skills at creating online content for library staff involved, and encouraged people who are not regular library users to use our services

The program also created an online resource about new technologies for the university community.

### Where to from here?

The program showed us that participants from all age groups can benefit from immersion in new technologies, regardless of whether they continued using the new technologies. The program broadened horizons and allowed staff and students to approach traditional problems in new ways.

Plans are afoot to reintroduce the program in 2010 with the possibility of two streams: one focused on postgraduate students and the other on staff, and tailoring the program in each demographic.

By its very nature emerging technology is fluid, and even during the program web tools can change (just ask us about creating multiple Gmail accounts from the same IP address).

For more information see **http://www.slideshare.net/katejf/what-we-learnt-2116281**

Thanks to Kathryn Greenhill and Kate Freedman (in absentia).

**Sue Dowling (with Aaron Trenorden and Pim McCready)**
**Serials & Electronic Resources Librarian**
**s.dowling@murdoch.edu.au**

## It's not enough to be good, they also have to like you: why libraries need to think about usability

In the two years between 2006 and 2008, Swinburne Library users' ratings of the library catalogue dropped noticeably, despite no changes having been made to the catalogue. The only possible reason for this drop is our users' increasing expectation that we provide modern, user-friendly, and attractive user interfaces – which our 25 year-old catalogue, replaced in early 2010, definitely was not.

This expectation is reflected more widely; information seekers are no longer content to use information systems that require the help of a librarian, and the fractured nature of library resources has been a source of confusion and frustration. Trends toward the use of Google have been berated by some commentators as heralding an age of stupidity; the reality is that the majority of information seekers are 'satisficers'—they are happy with the easiest way to find answer to their information need, even if it isn't the best one. Despite the fact that libraries are now only rarely the first port of call for information seekers, libraries are still well-respected as sites of authoritative, trustworthy information.

So how can we reconcile information seekers' frustrations with library systems and their respect for library information resources? One commonly-used approach is library training, which can ameliorate some of the problems with library interfaces, but reaches only those who attend the training. Another approach is help text provided either within a system or as supplementary material, but this only reaches the maximum 3-4% of users who actually read it.

Here at Swinburne, we have taken an additional, alternative approach to helping users with our information resources: usability. I am a full time usability analyst at Swinburne, and it is my role to ensure, insofar as it is possible to do so, that the software and services we offer our users are usable. Usability implies a number of factors: consistency with users' other experiences (for example, search services providing good relevance ranking, like Google does); consistency with the context of the software or service (in our case fitting in with the Swinburne website); speaking the users' language (i.e. avoiding jargon); and user autonomy (i.e. avoiding the need for help text or librarian assistance as much as possible).

It is my role to assess how the software and services we offer fit in with these factors, both through user testing, and by supporting decision-making using the literature and my training and academic background in usability. In the past three years at Swinburne I have surveyed our users about terminology; been involved in customising Swinburne Research Bank (**http://researchbank.swinburne.edu.au**) to reflect usability concerns; and, most recently, assisted at every stage of the selection and implementation of our new ILMS to ensure the outcome is the most usable system possible.

It's no longer enough to have the best information, or the system that allows the most search flexibility: library systems must be usable if they are to meet our users' expectations and convince users that library information resources are a viable option. At Swinburne we are committed to usability, and we believe this commitment will serve us well as we make decisions about new technologies and services into the future.

**Dana McKay**
**User Experience Architect**
**Swinburne University of Technology Library**
**dmckay@groupwise.swin.edu.au**

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