



#piratehatsWednesday

A social media story about growth through play



Social media doesn't always get good press within the library world. Which seems a pity, as for us, tools such as Twitter and Flickr offer wonderful opportunities to connect with a wide range of people, and keep up engagement and excitement about changing ways to share information. As Mal Booth from UTS and Ruth Baxter from Uni of Melbourne proved with #piratehatsWednesday.

Why we did it

Mal got bored one day. As our personal learning network had been following a challenge from Kat Clancy to try and focus on the positive, he decided to rephrase that boredom:



On the spur of the moment Mal suggested that we all wear pirate's hats in our libraries on the following Wednesday and it grew from there amongst colleagues on Twitter - just a bit of spontaneous, end-of-the-day fun.

We soon had two Twitter hashtags: #piratehatswednesday and #fornoparticularrreason. They said it all really. The second tag Mal developed because he knew people would soon be asking why they should do it or join in. The honest answer was that it was completely pointless. Even the quickly developed hashtags were far too long and were said to be inappropriate. We didn't care. Interestingly something for pure fun, without any clear inducements, received enthusiastic support.



Personal perspectives

Mal learnt that today's newspapers are not as stiff as those used when he was at school (way back when print was King), and his pirate's hat needed staples to stand up. Ruth learnt that spending on professional black cardboard to show effort actually meant that her heavy hat didn't have great balance, and OH&S concerns could have been raised every time she turned her head and almost took someone's eye out. Still, it did wonders for her department that day.

Mal also found out that, having set up something like this, UTS Library has a number of staff who are never again going to let him simply hide in his office all day. Ruth discovered that University students genuinely enjoyed the chance to talk about hand-making things when you don't see yourself as 'artistically enabled'.

What did this gain for others ?

When we were asked to write this for inCite, we thought about the more professional gains. For us the idea of learning through play doesn't require any success target other than active participation. Interestingly for some, even simple participation involved some small risk. Some customers in libraries were annoyed by the performance, and some library staff were worried about whether they would be perceived as less committed to the ideals of librarianship. Given our pointless purpose I guess you could say we were successful though. We think the sense of escape from confining work structures, and the new networking connections formed among the participants from that day are quite valuable outcomes. It was also a quick, fast experiment with Twitter and how effective it might be at encouraging spontaneous group action within the library world.

It was a no pressure practice for some on how to send a tweet, search by hashtags and follow a library discussion theme. It was a practical motivator for some librarians to add photos to Flickr, including relevant user-generated tags. Another participant created a QR code advertising the day.

Mainly it got us, and many more, smiling all day and for several days after. The event encouraged a number of librarians to have a bit of fun and to learn by playing in their libraries. They were given license to do something silly, unpredictable and out of the ordinary for most librarians – it allowed some personalities to emerge.

Feel free to go view all our favourite pirates at www.flickr.com/groups/1472829@N25/

What failed

Ruth and Mal quickly tried to get some big name celebs involved. Just for the fun of it. Whilst Matthew Mitcham and the lads from Jinja Safari made early promises, they were short on delivery. Both had other priorities at that time, we didn't follow up and they probably forgot about our event over the course of the week that followed because they simply don't follow a lot of librarians. Maybe libraries are not as interesting as we might think they are. It didn't matter as we were not relying on it, but it gave us some hints about getting library events into the wider publicity world in the future.

Where to next?

We could easily do it again and look at extending its reach, but frankly we are both too bored by repetition. (Anyone else who wants to take it up, please go ahead.)

Rather, we will, at the right moment, think of something completely different #fornoparticularrreason. We could be even more ambitious, experimental and disruptive next time. I'm not sure what yet, but we're open to suggestions...

Please note - views expressed above are of course our own and in no way represent our institutions!

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