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# Reflecting on 23 Things @ Warwick

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Warwick University Library recently ran a '23 Things' programme for library staff to help them develop their skills and understanding around Web 2.0 technologies (1). This approach breaks the sometimes daunting world of social networking applications into bite-sized chunks (or Things) that are easier to manage and absorb. Some of the Things are 'doing' Things – using tools we have all heard of and many have never dared touch – whilst other Things are 'reflecting' Things, using blogging to capture personal observations on new technologies tried and new skills developed.

One of us (Antony) was sponsor of the programme, a Digital Adventurer who has travelled a distance to embrace new Web 2.0 tools. The other (Emma) was the programme organiser, a Digital Native who regularly blogs, tweets and collaborates online. Both of us got a lot out of the 23 Things Warwick programme.

Antony first became fully aware of the 23 Things approach when he was offered articles for *SCONUL Focus* about the programme from Ciara McCaffrey at the University of Limerick and one Emma Cragg from Oxford (2). When Emma came to work for Warwick it seemed obvious that we should use her expertise and get her to run the 23 Things programme for us too. Emma was in an especially good position to do this with the ability to draw on her experience from Oxford, and having watched how Cambridge had taken that and improved upon it. Her instruction was to make it even better for Warwick!

We decided to run the programme in the Spring Term in the first instance as this would be the 'quieter' term for some staff in terms of outward-facing activities. The Things would be less complex than in some previous iterations, with more demanding tools spread out over two Things. We would also factor in more 'free' weeks to provide (much needed) catch up times. There would also be lots of surgery or one-to-one support offered and peer support encouraged. It was anticipated that staff should spend 1-2 hours per week on their Things, depending on their pre-knowledge and ability to pick up new techniques.

The programme ran from January to March 2011 and the final Thing encouraged participants to reflect on the whole 23 Things.

So what did we get out of it?

From his blog, **Librarian Boy** observed:

For a start, it was good to have a structured course to complete. If that had not been the case I would never have forced myself to try out all the tools covered. The Things were mercifully small. Splitting more difficult tasks into two or more Things was a good idea.

It was reassuring that I had used quite a lot of the tools already. I use Flickr and YouTube (as an end-user rather than contributor) all the time. I had viewed SlideShare before and have had bursts of activity on Delicious. I knew I had an iGoogle account (set up years ago and seldom used) so it was good to re-discover that. So I realised I wasn't such a Web 2.0 novice after all. I definitely learnt I should perhaps use some of these tools a bit more often!

I enjoyed some elements a lot. I enjoyed writing blog postings. I think Twitter is a good discipline ('communicate effectively in 140 characters') and a good excuse to save time. I also got a strange buzz out of editing something on Wikipedia and being part of that massive community.

The only down side was the time commitment and the fact that I could not devote as much time to the Things as I would have liked. But this isn't a 23 Things issue, it is an Antony having 5,000,023 things on the go issue...

**Ekcragg** reflected in the **Captain's (B)log**:

What I think I will take away from this programme that is of greatest importance is an understanding of how other people think about social media. I am an early adopter, a digital native, a digitalist, and social media is a large part of my home and work life. Sometimes it is difficult to appreciate how other people approach and evaluate these tools. Reading about their experiences through the participant blogs helps me to gain perspective.

One of the great things that came out of the 23 Things programme at Oxford was the sense of community that developed among the participants. This is definitely the same here. There seems to be a buzz about 23 Things wherever I go; I hear people talking about it within their teams and in the staff room. In the corridor people approach me with glee to let me know exactly where they're up to and what thing they're currently tackling. I'll miss that when it's over.

Comments from some of the other participants' reflective blogs appear in boxes throughout this article.

"In my first blog entry, I referred to the programme as a pilgrimage and that's what it has been like, in some ways - a shared journey, where the participants became a micro community within the vast Web 2.0 community. We've worked together, learned from each other and there's always been someone to ask for guidance if I didn't interpret the instructions correctly. Social networking tools, by their nature, have to be shared." – **Ubuntu Moments** (Helen Ireland)

"I've thoroughly enjoyed the 23 Things experience, and really feel like I've learnt a great deal about web 2.0. As both a computer scientist and a 'young person' I feel it's expected of me to understand all these technologies, and I now feel that I do! I would feel a lot more confident in making use of any of them either at work or at home." – **The Metadata Magician** (Rachel Care)

"I confidently said at the start I was a big user of Web 2.0 tools and I was just looking to brush up my skills, but I have found that I have learnt far more than I was expecting." - **In the library with...** (Yvonne Budden)

"The style of the course is different to anything I have done previously: exploring and learning about online technology at my own pace, and then choosing to use or abandon whichever elements I like or dislike as I see fit. I think that posting blogs as a means of keeping track of our progress particularly suits this type of course, as it's kept wholly virtual." - **Naughty Orange** (Natalie Hodgkiss)

The 23 Things programme was to come to an end on 18 March 2011 and all participants should have completed all 23 elements by then. In truth, we found that staff needed a little extra time so a short extension was granted, during which time certain parts of the Library were like a Web 2.0 testing factory.

Staff had put in a massive effort so we needed a party. The unofficial 24<sup>th</sup> Thing was a celebration afternoon held in the Library's Teaching Grid. Awards were given for Best Blog, Best Blog Name, Best Blog Post, Progress, and Peer Support. Even those of us who did not win a trophy won an award for something; Antony proudly took the title for best profile picture, as displayed at the top of this article.

So what next?

The 23 Things Team are planning to run an amended programme over the summer in the hope to reach staff who have not been able to do (or keep up with) Things first time around.

For the Library's offering, there is scope for rolling elements of the programme out more widely to our user communities. We have already run some sessions on Web 2.0 aimed at the students. Why shouldn't we be running a Number of Things for our students, academics and other users? The amount of things we could do is limitless ...well, certainly more than 23.

## NOTES

1. See <http://23thingswarwick.blogspot.com>
2. Ciara McCaffrey, Peter Reilly and Helen Feighan. 23 Things@UL: a web 2.0 learning experience for faculty and staff at the University of Limerick, *SCONUL Focus*, 50, 2010, p.25-28; Laura Wilkinson and Emma Cragg. 23 Things Oxford, *SCONUL Focus*, 50, 2010, p.29-31