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23 Things Oxford



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'23 Things Oxford' began on 18 January 2010 and finished 12 weeks later on 9 April 2010. The aim of the programme was to introduce all library staff in Oxford libraries, whatever their role, to web 2.0 technologies – working on the principle that exposure is the first stage in learning.

LEARNING 2.0

The original '23 Things' programme, Learning 2.0, was designed by Helene Blowers, technology director at the public library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County in North Carolina.¹ The aim of the programme was to introduce library staff to emerging technologies through the completion of 23 'things', or tasks. Participants record their progress on the programme by blogging about their experience each week. The programme ran over nine weeks, each week focusing on a different set of tools and comprising two or three 'things'. The content of the programme was

delivered through the Learning 2.0 blog, a method which allowed the programme to be entirely self-directed so that participants could complete their 'things' at a time to suit them.

CUSTOMISING THE '23 THINGS' PROGRAMME

In late 2009 Laura Wilkinson, then deputy manager of staff development for the Bodleian libraries (formerly Oxford University library services), came up with the idea of modifying the Learning 2.0 programme for Oxford's librarians. This was made possible because the original programme had been shared under a creative commons license, which permits the work to be modified for non-commercial purposes as long as the original is attributed.

The first step towards getting Oxford's '23 Things' programme up and running was for Laura to secure the support of her line manager, the head of human resources. After this she set about assembling a team of web 2.0 enthusiasts to help with the planning and delivery of the programme. Throughout the planning stages, the team only met twice; the rest of the work was done online in the spirit of the programme, via Google Docs.

Planning began with the creation of our list of weekly themes and then the 23 'things' themselves.² At this stage, it was decided to extend the programme from nine to twelve weeks in order to give the participants a little longer to complete each task. Once the list of 'things' was drawn up, each member of the team was assigned two or three weeks when they would act as lead. For each week it was the lead's responsibility to write the instructions for the week's 'things' and respond to questions relating to the week's tasks, on the blog and via e-mail. All general enquiries were handled by Laura as team leader.

In order to make the programme as accessible as possible for all library staff we made some significant changes to the original programme. We were aware that some participants might be reluctant to sign up to some of the social networking sites and so for these tasks we avoided compulsory sign-up. We attempted to keep the number of different accounts to a minimum; where possible we used Google and Yahoo! services in order to achieve this. In addition to the online programme, we also decided to run a series of drop-in sessions, one in the first week to help participants get started and two subsequently in the weeks when the 'things' required additional hardware or computer functionality that not all participants may have

had access to, such as cameras, microphones and sound-enabled PCs so they could listen to podcasts.

The original Learning 2.0 programme offered an MP3 player to all participants as an incentive and upon completion their names were entered into a prize draw for a new laptop. We decided that a small incentive was a good way to encourage participants to complete the programme. CrossRef kindly agreed to sponsor the programme, to fund the prizes.³ Each participant who completed all 23 'things' by 9 April was given the choice of either a £10 Amazon or iTunes voucher and their names were entered into a draw for an iPod Nano.

'23 THINGS OXFORD' – OX23

Oxford's '23 Things' programme was delivered via the Ox23 blog at <http://23thingsoxford.blogspot.com>. Each week three or four posts were published, including an introduction to the week's theme, step-by-step instructions on how to complete the 'things' and ideas for exploring the topic further. The themes for each week were as follows:

- 1 Introduction and personalised homepages
- 2 Blogging
- 3 RSS feeds
- 4 Online photos and images
- 5 Social bookmarking
- 6 Podcasting / YouTube
- 7 Social networking
- 8 Twitter
- 9 Wikis
- 10 Office 2.0
- 11 Widgets
- 12 Summary of experiences.

138 members of library staff registered to take part in the programme and set up blogs to record their progress.⁴ Of these, 82 participants successfully completed the programme.

FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

At the end of the programme a survey was sent to all staff who had registered to take part in the programme. It was a deliberate decision to include participants who had not registered their completion so that we could find out the reasons why they had not finished the programme. The response rate for this survey was 72%. The majority of respondents said they found the frequency, duration and level of the tasks just right. An

overwhelming 93% said they would recommend the programme to their colleagues.

23% of respondents to the survey said that they did not complete the programme. The main reason given for this was lack of time. Other responses were that the tasks were too difficult and there were concerns over privacy and the number of accounts created.

In addition to the survey responses, we received feedback from the e-mails and blog posts of the participants. An area that was often cited as a success was the community that the programme created, both online and in our libraries. Here is a selection of comments from the participants' final blog posts, where they were asked to summarise their experiences with web 2.0 during the course of the programme:

*'I'm delighted to have mastered so much & to have explored web 2.0. I feel much more confident technically & am delighted that, at last, I know what this stuff actually *is*.'*

(Alison's blog, <http://ali-mal.blogspot.com/2010/04/winning-post.html>)

'I felt it was an excellent and timely opportunity for me to expand my knowledge of web 2.0 tools and somehow determine the extent to which they could be effectively used in a University library setting.'

(Cesar's 23 Things, <http://cesar23things.blogspot.com/2010/03/final-reflections.html>)

'23 things was definitely a worthwhile program, and I learnt lots, and it's inspired me to the possibilities of web 2.0.'

(James at OIL, <http://jamesatoil.blogspot.com/2010/04/and-now-end-is-here.html>)

FEEDBACK FROM THE ORGANISERS

There is no doubt that being involved in the running of the '23 Things' programme at Oxford was an enjoyable and rewarding experience. It was also a great challenge. No matter how well prepared we thought we were, we still encountered some issues as the weeks went by; none, however, were insurmountable. One thing we were not prepared for was the unease with which some participants greeted the public nature of web 2.0. We had anticipated that signing up to Facebook would be controversial for some and therefore did not require it for completion of the task that week; however, we met similar concerns with LinkedIn and modified the task to reflect this. Some participants chose to remain anonymous, and

created accounts and blogs under a pseudonym. This was fine, and the only time we asked them to identify themselves was on the registration and completion forms, which only the organisers saw. This was necessary in order to ensure that anyone receiving an incentive was a member of staff at a library within the University of Oxford.

One of the most interesting aspects of the programme was its success as a training programme that staff completed at their desks. A number of participants commented on this on their blogs and expressed a desire to have more training delivered in this way. This was of particular interest as most of the training for library staff at Oxford has previously taken place in face-to-face workshops. Releasing staff to attend such workshops can be problematic, especially in libraries with a lot of part-time staff. Developing an alternative method of delivering training that can increase participation is an area that we are comfortable with for our students but it has not yet been applied to staff training.

WHAT NEXT?

As soon as the programme had ended there were many questions about the possibility of 'Things 24' and beyond. With so many library staff now more familiar with social media, the next step seemed to be using these skills to create or improve the social-media presence of Oxford libraries, and this is how '23 Things summer camp' was born.

'23 Things summer camp' involves three sessions that help library staff with their social-media strategy, setup and synchronisation of tools.⁵ Each session is to run twice in July and August 2010, and it is hoped that this will give staff the knowledge and confidence to start using tools such as Facebook, blogging, LibraryThing, Delicious and Twitter, and begin marketing these services to their readers from the beginning of the academic year 2010–2011. The strategy session includes determining success criteria, such as numbers of hits, comments or followers.

We look forward to seeing the expanding social-media presence of many libraries across the University of Oxford ... and (if this article has the desired effect!) beyond.

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