

20 Things to Watch

by Stephen Abram

So, what's on my list of things to pay extra special attention to? When we're deluged, swamped and overwhelmed by news and blog postings and other media, what do I use as my filter to trap just the important stuff that will matter to libraries? I am not going to purport that this column lists everything I pay attention to but it is a basic list of the things that I think will have a big impact on enterprises, libraries, information and librarians in the next five years. This list is in no particular order. In the messy world of environmental and technology scanning nothing comes neatly packaged or sorted. I should also note that my list isn't deeply geeky. I tend to prefer to watch what's happening in the user end of things. User behaviour trumps geek – and librarian – behaviour every time. So here goes, 20 things to watch:

1. **Mobile:** I have to say I watch this one a lot. Just stand in a commuter train and look at all those downward cast eyes. What are they doing? Do you look? Are they e-mailing? Texting? Playing games? Choosing music? Adding phone numbers? What? What's the ratio of actual old style phone calls to Crackberry™ behaviours? I think it will be the dominant personal device in North America very soon.
2. **GPS / GIS:** Are you checking out those car systems (Babble Betty or Silicon Sally?) that tell you where to turn? Have you noticed the purse-sized ones? GPS is big and getting bigger and will start to change the web experience as we know it. Search engines know where you are. Scary, eh? Have you played any of the geo-coding or geo-caching games? It's just the tip of the iceberg.
3. **Open Handset Alliance (also known as Android):** Watch Google's open initiative to connect all phones on the same standard. Most phone manufacturers have joined. Combine this with web standards or the potential of gaming standards and things like the Open Content Alliance and you can see strong potential for any kind of content to be easily used on handhelds.
4. **Tagging:** A Pew Internet Study said that almost 38% of the North American population was tagging and 7% were tagging daily using things like delicious and Flickr. Just imagine the potential for this kind of tagging for personal use to extend to determining social relevance in search rankings. In the R&D and academic settings this could be amazingly powerful as circles of influence. It's amazingly watchable and with the movement to merge Microsoft with Yahoo's Flickr and Delicious properties, hmmm.

5. **Scrapbooking:** It is now possible to search web articles, licensed resources in databases like EBSCO and seamlessly capture fulltext, references & citations for research at a later date. It allows you to find your original article from your PC. This is amazing and builds on the tools we like such as RefWorks. Imagine what this will look like all grown up. Imagine the usefulness of research paths after studying them in bulk.
6. **SaaS- Software as a Service:** This is software application hosts; using a server farm to store software, and then assuring that all versioning control is even and all software is up-to-date. Enterprise software subscriptions based in the ether world have great potential. It makes it easier to keep software updated and saves money when shared by several institutions or organizations. It also allows for expensive items to be shared collaboratively and for costs to be reduced – like advanced security, backups, malware protections, etc.
7. **Microblogging:** Go beyond Twitter and other microbloggers. Check out the microblogging features at Facebook and MySpace. Several social networking systems are running events and will have an impact on such major events as the party conventions in the near future.
8. **Social content:** A whole generation of people have now bookmarked tons of information. How can we capture & share this content? What goes beyond delicious tags in a wiki? This area is heating up as content starts getting stored in social spaces like Facebook and Ning. Those of us who care about information curation, discovery and custody ignore this at our peril.
9. **Social networking:** We (librarians) can't ignore social networks as a tool to connect with users. We need to find ways to use it to promote the library and connect with groups of users, researchers, classrooms, and more. I am amazed at the explosion of .private, white label social networking sites and tools too.
10. **Social networking integration:** - Like the Android project, the developer packages for the social networks hold extreme interest. Facebook's F8, MySpace's, SDK Developer, IBM's avatar project and the Google OpenSocial initiative all merit attention. The mere idea of tightly connecting library web pages to social networking and tagging sites is mouth watering.
11. **e-books:** This cannot be ignored. In parts of the world this is the biggest collection they have. The University of Michigan passed 1 million "Googlized" e-books in January! We need to determine how e-books can be combined with other e-content and integrated into other formats, including hard copy. The numbers are reaching the critical mass we saw for magazine articles when they hit the tipping point in the early 90's.
12. **e-book devices:** e-Book devices are still a problem; we need to get e-books on phones, PC's, everywhere. The Kindle is nice but cannot be lent, Amazon thinks. The Sony Reader is cool but their ads making fun of librarians suck. It's time to play with these and see where needs to be done. The Apple Touch, iPod, merged gaming devices and any kind of

- phone needs investigation. They are easier to use, so libraries should be able to align our services with them and attract users.
13. **Personal homepages:** A library homepage is a good start. It's not enough and will never be the primary destination page. Nothing will. Individuals will assemble their own start pages of their favourite stuff. Libraries need to link to personal homepages in order to make ourselves more relevant to the user's space. Standards like the emerging portlet standard, JSR168, need to be watched.
 14. **Cloud software:** By cloud software I mean the ability to use what is not loaded on your device and store your works there too. I mean services like Google Docs and Zoho that provide integrated web-centric software online. Libraries can offer more integration of software & content and create collaborative creation spaces for our users. For things like presentations the future is already here. Google is launching an offline version of Google Docs. We used to call that Microsoft Office (grin).
 15. **RSS groups & readers:** We're already addicted to our Bloglines and Google Reader feeds. It's so much simpler to read blogs that way. New RSS tools let us use them to our advantage to cluster similar topics together on our websites such as a local news ticker or to schedule weekly or daily lessons. Watch RSS go hot but hidden.
 16. **Podcasts and Music:** Many libraries are creating and offering podcasts to users or having users make podcasts themselves. We can post them on our websites for educational purposes. It's exciting to look into the plethora of podcast search engines. Searching music/video collections; both pay & free, like iTunes, Limewire and SpiralFrog, for resources in the collection development and research mode has exciting potential. If we learn from services like Pandora, can we think about what the information channel of the future – driven by metadata and social tagging, might look like?
 17. **Streaming media:** It's essential to watch the changes in video learning and production. DVDs are going away; streaming is in. Sets of streaming media are already available to libraries, but the technology isn't perfect. We shouldn't wait for perfection, but should work with it now. It's a space to watch for innovation.
 18. **Custom search and MicroFederation:** Watch services like Google Custom Search Engine (CSE) to try grouping library blogs or certain databases by subject. It is best built locally to focus on specific user niches.
 19. **OpenID:** Federated identity management is the Holy Grail. The huge number of major players who are adopting or agreeing to adopt the emerging OpenID standard is exciting. The ability to have one secure ID that allows users to have one ID rather than multiple usernames and passwords is a major way to remove barriers to a successful web user experience. Watch as this grows. As people get better at managing their web presence and doing it in a 'safe' manner, we will see the emergence of users having different identities, such as parent, librarian, researcher,

student and sophisticated management of multi-dimensional identities. Combine this with avatars and the whole works becomes very exciting.

20. **eLearning:** There is so much happening in this space that it is a task unto itself. Solutions are being experimented with to address multi-dimensional learning styles. From end-user ready learning objects to full courses are reaching market through aggregations like SLA's CLICK U. E-learning is the expansion of learning modality, the removal of the distance barrier. Libraries are learning to address such opportunities as Blackboard, Atomic Learning and a raft of private and public sector initiatives. It's one to watch.

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Partner with your fellow members, chapters and divisions. What do we have to lose?

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