

Why our liaison blogs failed and what we did to save them

2 CASE STUDIES + 10 LESSONS LEARNED

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Case Study #1 The Bioinformionista

Background

The *Bioinformionista* blogger, Jean Song, created the blog as part of a group project to experiment with using a variety of Web 2.0 tools to reach out to our liaison departments. As the Bioinformionist, Jean naturally created a blog aimed at the bioinformatics community at the University of Michigan. Although originally hesitant, she soon discovered that she found a lot of joy in blogging and has been a prolific blogger ever since.

Why it failed

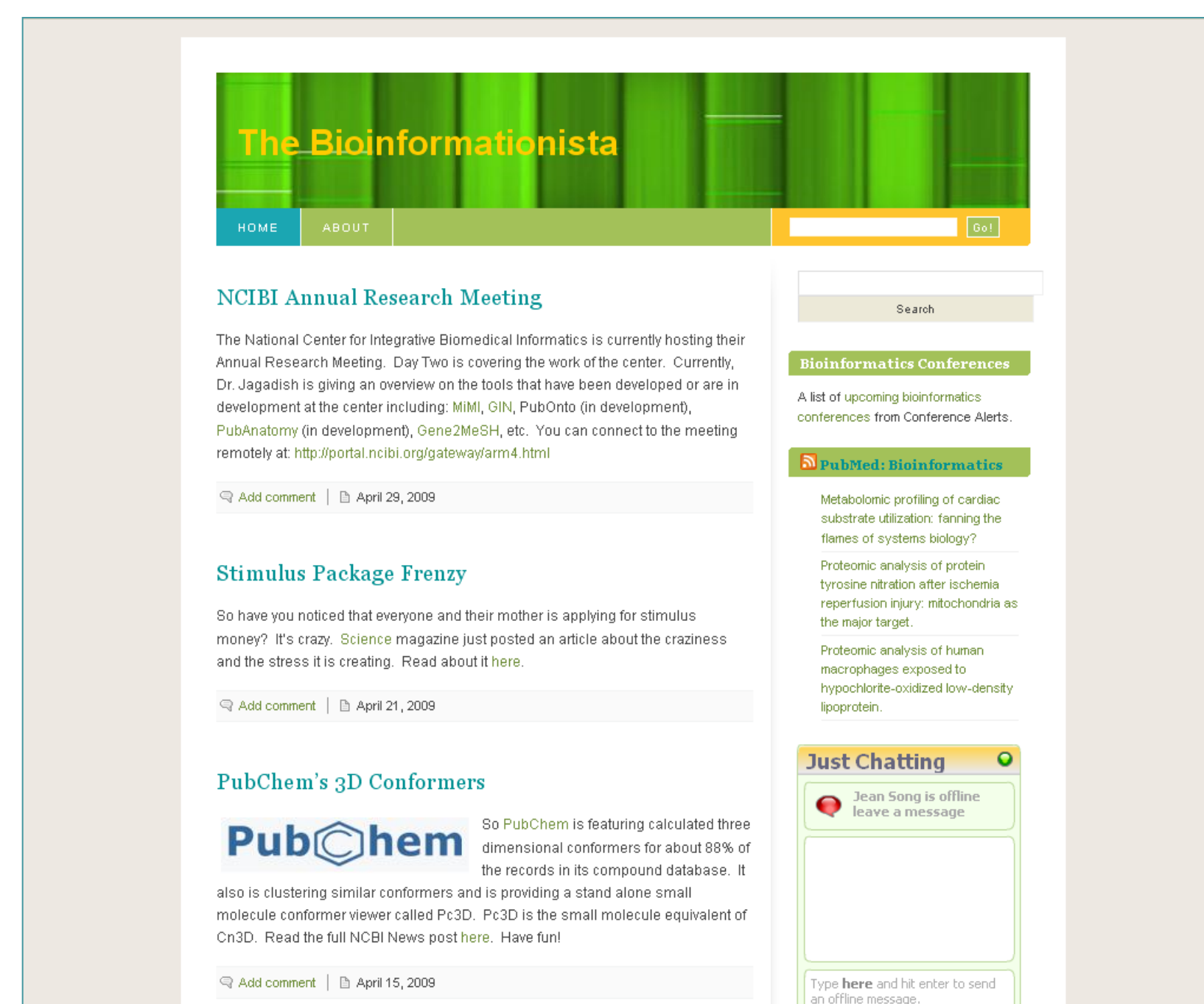
No one was reading the blog. Although Jean loved blogging and had a personal, engaging writing style and focused, informative posts, no one in her department was reading the blog or commenting on it. Jean had simply created the blog, posted to it regularly, and hoped that people would find it.

How she saved it

Jean began a campaign to promote the blog to the bioinformatics researchers and staff. She incorporated her blog into several presentations. The first of these was presented during a bioinformatics weekly seminar series which is also webcasted out to the general public. She also presented her blog at a bioinformatics conference and internally to the librarians at the university. She also started blogging on topics not just directly related to bioinformatics but also items of great personal interest to her such as Open Access. This has increased her traffic and the engagement of her target audience.

Jean also added a number of new features to her blog, including

- Links to other bioinformatics blogs
- An RSS feed from PubMed with new articles on bioinformatics
- A Twitter feed
- A Meebo widget for real-time chat



1 Have clear goals

If you don't know why you are blogging and who you are blogging for, your blog will fail. What is the audience you are trying to reach? What do they need? What do you want to tell them?

2 Blog with other librarians

Maintaining a blog by yourself can be a drag. Get one or two of your colleagues to blog with you. This will reduce the pressure on you and also liven up the blog.

3 Blog with someone in your liaison department

Is there someone in your liaison department that might want to be a co-author on your blog? The education coordinator? A resident or student? Co-blogging with someone in the department is a great way to integrate both yourself and your blog into the life of the department.

4 Tell people about it

Absolutely no one is going to read your blog if you don't tell them about it. Unfortunately, once you tell them about it, nearly no one is going to go back and look at it again without a prompt. Keep reminding folks that your blog exists. Use especially good posts as an excuse to email spam your group with a reminder.

5 Get more bang for your buck

Remember RSS? Use it. Feed your blog into Twitter, a Facebook page, and your web site. This is an easy way to expand your audience.

6 Accept failure

If it doesn't work, if no one is reading it, and you've tried a number of ways to promote it, don't be afraid to just stop blogging. Not all tools fit all groups. Try again with a new group, a new topic, or a new slant.

7 Keep it personal

Have opinions and a personality in your blog posts- it will be far more engaging than reading a dry "official" library publication.

8 Link up with other bloggers

And I don't just mean David Rothman. Find other blogs in your liaison field and make connections outside of the library world.

9 Be useful

Create a resource, provide an explanation, give advice, write a review, tell people how to do something, tell people something new.

10 Make it part of your job

Really, this is probably already part of your job. The part about "communicating with your liaison departments"? That includes blogging.

Case Study #2 OrthoSurg → Cardiovascular Disease

Background

Whitney Townsend is the library liaison to a number of clinical areas at the University of Michigan. She originally created an orthopedic surgery blog, *OrthoSurg@UM*, as part of an experiment to reach out to liaison departments using Web 2.0 technologies.

Why it failed

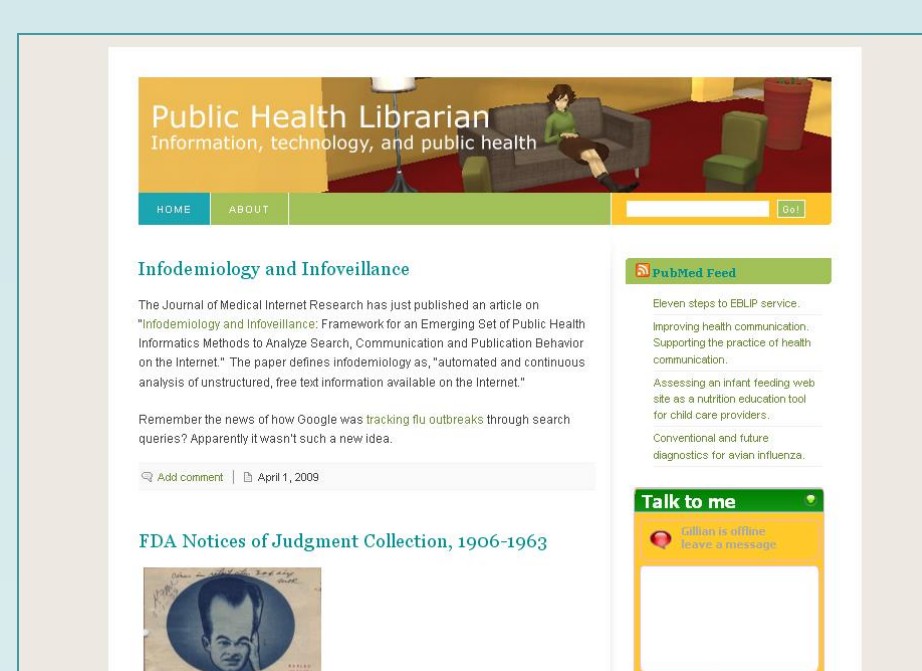
She simply could not engage this audience with the blog. She posted regular, informative, and useful information to the blog. She emailed the clinicians, residents, and staff in the orthopedic surgery department about the blog. She worked hard to find a co-blogger in the department to work with her. None of these efforts, however, garnered any interest from her primary audience.

How she saved it

She didn't. She let the blog fail. She recognized that despite her efforts, this was not a useful tool for communicating with this particular group.

Whitney then looked at her other departments to explore the effectiveness of a blog for a different department and a different culture. She immediately engaged the interest of the Research Administrator at the Cardiovascular Center. The administrator was very enthusiastic about co-blogging and could see the potential of both the technology and the partnership. There have been some stumbling blocks along the way, but these have been solved by:

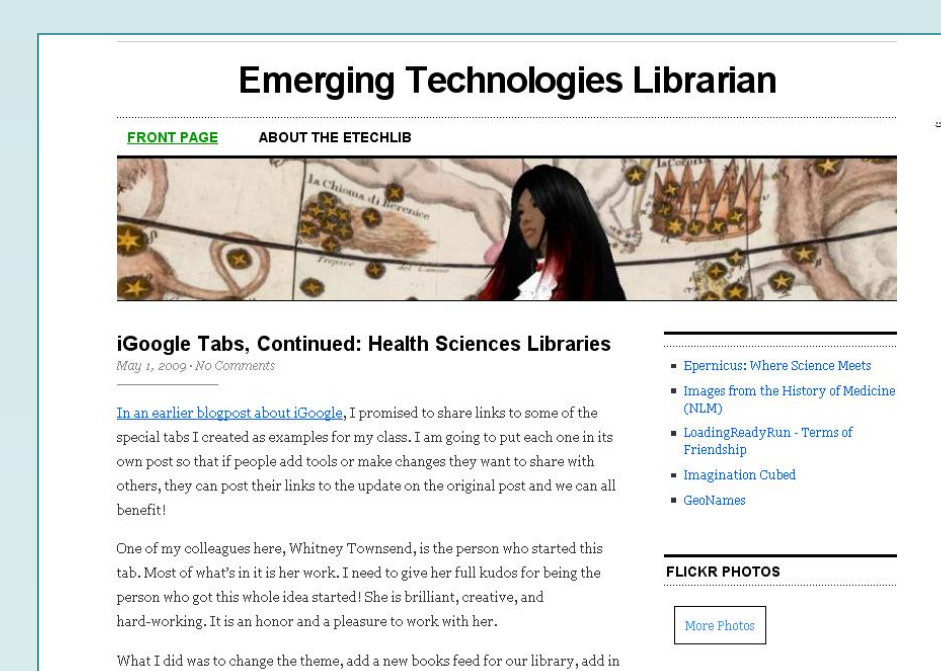
- Protecting the information by using blogging software hosted at the University of Michigan
- Engaging community buy-in from the beginning
- Creating the blog as a department blog and not a library blog
- Identifying other staff within the department to contribute as co-bloggers



Public Health Librarian
<http://mblog.lib.umich.edu/dentlib/>



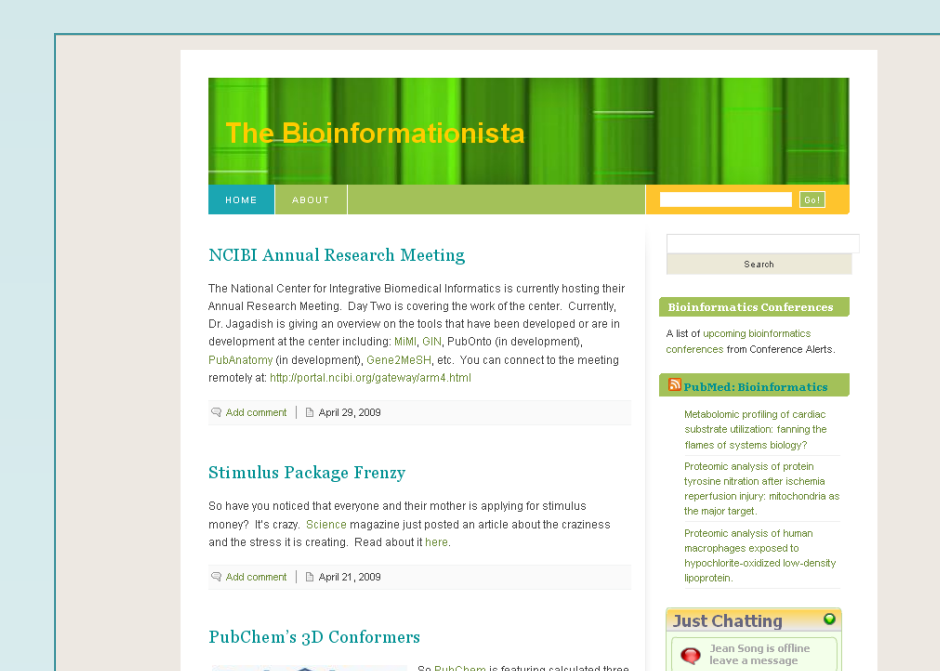
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<http://mblog.lib.umich.edu/hsl/>



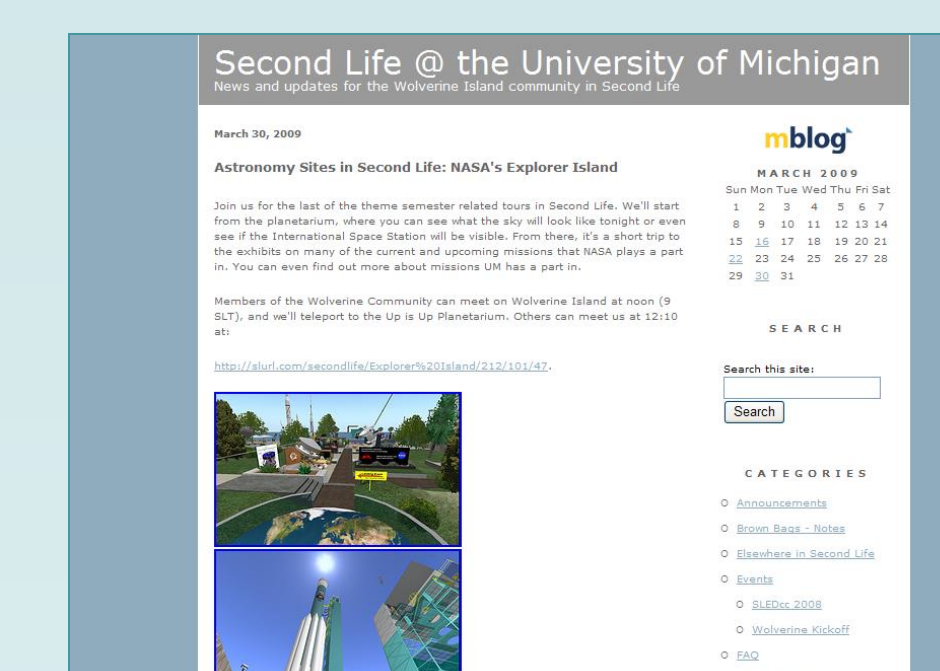
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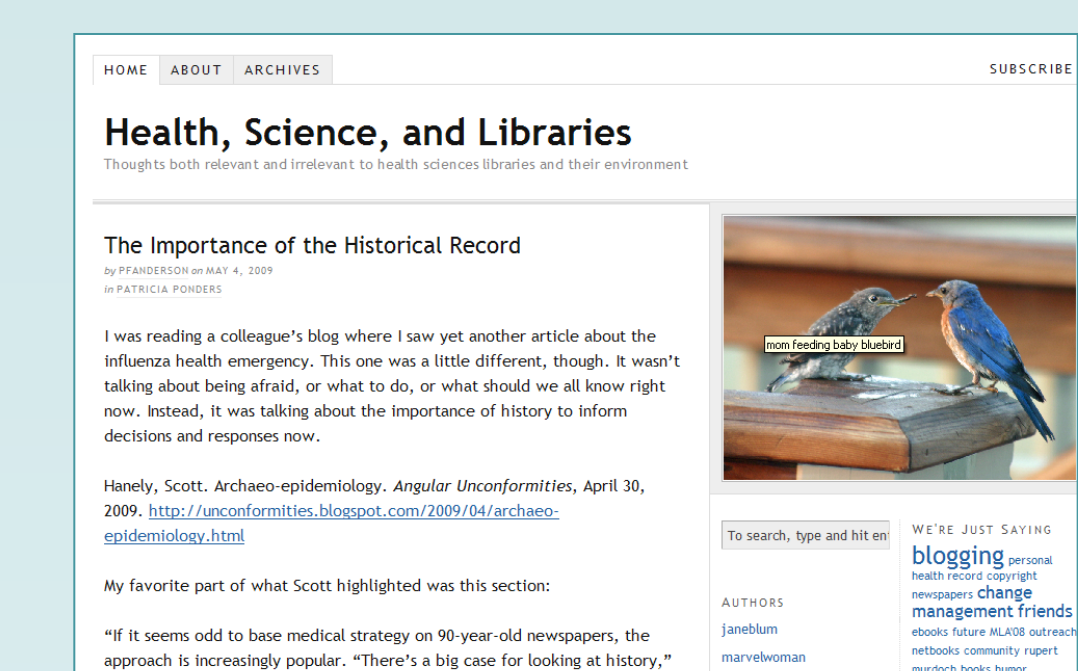
Dentistry Information & Library Innovation
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The Bioinformionista
<http://jeansong.wordpress.com/>



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