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

2 CASE STUDIES + 10 LESSONS LEARNED

Gillian Mayman, Jean Song, Whitney Townsend, Mark MacEachern
Health Sciences Libraries
University of Michigan

Case Study #1 The Bioinformationista

Background
The Bioinformationista 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 Bioinformationist, 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 within bioinformatics conference and internally to the librarians at the university. She simply could not engage this audience with the blog. She posted regular, informative posts, but no one was reading the blog or commenting on it. Jean had to find a way to engage this audience.

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.

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.

Link up with other bloggers
And I don’t just mean David Rothman. Find other blogs in your liaison department and make connections outside of the library world.

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

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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