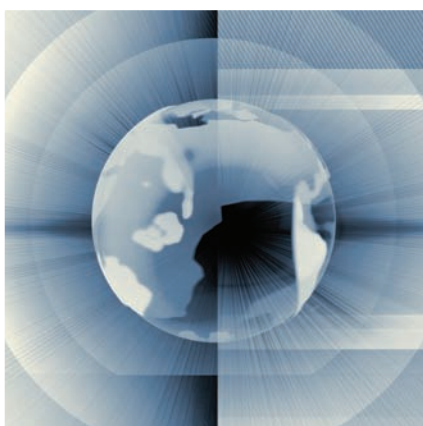


The Impact of 2.0



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Are you missing the point?

*Traditional authority is under threat from Web 2.0,
but those who ignore the net's new collaborative
culture will get left behind*

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Over the last two years the concept of Web 2.0 has entered mainstream discourse and spawned a number of other '2.0s': Democracy 2.0, Learning 2.0, Culture 2.0, even Government 2.0, and of course Library 2.0. In fact you can add 2.0 to pretty much anything to give it a bit of contemporary web zing. Clearly much of this is hype, but underneath the froth there is something important going on, something that is of particular relevance to libraries. I say this because the fundamental changes are to do with librarians' raw material – information. A 'library' company, Google, is now one of the largest and highest-profile businesses in the world. So it's an exciting time of opportunity for those that can see the wood and not just the trees.

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Librarians have witnessed other paradigm shifts in their long past, with printing being perhaps the most important. While no doubt the geeks of past centuries would have waxed lyrical about the technologies, the real importance is the impact. Even the earliest printing presses allowed a new scale of operation. Libraries had to manage and provide access, not to tens, but to thousands and then millions of books. The Internet has brought another similar step-change.

Lawrence Lessig, of Stanford Law School, has described how this has 'unleashed a capacity for speaking' hitherto suppressed by economic constraint.¹ Printing presses are expensive to buy and run and most publishing was organised on an industrial scale. Cheap computers, the web and broadband have given to millions of

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people the ownership of the 'means of production' and access to millions of potential consumers. Moreover once texts are digitised they take on a fascinating new attribute that economists call 'non-rival'. Unlike a printed book, a digitised text can be used by countless people at the same time without interference (no need to look over a shoulder) or destruction (an e-text doesn't wear out) of the shared resource. In these terms an e-book is technically speaking a limitless resource. My use of a Project Gutenberg text does not rival your use. The cost of producing and delivering each new 'copy' is also effectively zero.

We also see the blurring of the traditional demarcation between producer and consumer. Users are no longer passive recipients of content. Technology allows the mixing ('mash-up') of content together to create new information and even new and innovative software applications. Charles Leadbeater of the think-tank Demos has described the rise of the Professional Amateur or 'Pro-Am' as the outcome of this new mode of user-driven production.² This new approach is based on a collaborative culture, which in turn requires technology platforms to enable information to be shared and remixed.

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1 www.motherjones.com/interview/2007/07/lawrence_lessig.html

2 'How enthusiasts are changing our economy and society'. By Charles Leadbeater & Paul Miller. Demos 2004 www.demos.co.uk/publications/proameconomy

This is challenging notions of copyright and intellectual property and is turning business models on their head. Recently the band Crimea gave away their new album free on the web. They intend to make their money from touring and merchandising instead.³

Michael Gorman, Past President of the American Library Association, speaks of the erosion of traditional ‘respect for authenticity and expertise’ and ‘a world in which everyone is an expert in a world devoid of expertise’.

Not everyone is happy about the growth of user-created content. Andrew Keen in his book *The Cult of the Amateur* claims: ‘We’re diving headlong into an age of mass mediocrity.’ In a recent interview with *Wired* magazine he said: ‘I don’t want the crowd to tell me what’s worth watching. I want a movie critic to tell me that. I don’t want the crowd to tell me where to eat, because I don’t trust them to know. Give me the old gatekeepers any day’.

Michael Gorman, Past President of the American Library Association, speaks of the erosion of traditional ‘respect for authenticity and expertise’ and ‘a world in which everyone is an expert in a world devoid of expertise’.⁴ This concern for authoritative information in an age of information superabundance has spawned a whole new ‘Authority 2.0’ debate.⁵

What will happen to libraries if they ignore the government lead and fail to respond? I believe they will become increasingly marginalised, though probably not quite extinct.



Government has nevertheless acknowledged the importance of aspects of the new information economy and is looking at reducing current constraints on the re-use of public sector information, and the *Guardian* waxed lyrical in June. ‘Imagine Government 2.0. Wisdom no longer flows from officialdom to the population, but is co-created with citizens. Civil servants contribute openly to Facebook groups on controversies of the day. Government websites have wiki areas where people can exchange tips about filing tax returns or claiming benefits. Databases of restaurant inspections, tide tables and postcodes are available for all to see and re-use in mash-ups.’ What will happen to libraries if they ignore the government lead and fail to respond? I believe they will become increasingly marginalised, though probably not quite extinct. I see them possibly viewed with affection and even revered as a piece of street furniture like the old red telephone boxes: useful very occasionally and smelling pungently of a lost past.

Ken Chad spoke on the ‘Impact of 2.0’ at the 2007 Internet Librarian International conference in London, UK, www.internet-librarian.com

3 ‘Off the record’. By Robert Sandall. Prospect Magazine. Issue 137. August 2007
www.prospect-magazine.co.uk/printarticle.php?id=9735

4 ‘The Siren Song of the Internet: Part I’. Michael Gorman. Britannica Blog 18 June 2007
<http://blogs.britannica.com/blog/main/2007/06/the-siren-song-of-the-internet-part-i/>

5 ‘The New Metrics of Scholarly Authority’. By Michael Jensen. The Chronicle of Higher Education. 15 June 2007.
<http://chronicle.com/free/v53/i41/41b00601.htm>

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Works with organisations such as government, local authorities, schools, colleges and universities, to help make better use of their technology to realise the full potential of their library and information function.

Phrases like 'Web 2.0' (and even now 'Web 3.0'), the 'semantic web' and 'Library 2.0' have become common currency. Innovative business models driven by new, web based technologies have profoundly and permanently changed the way many users interact with the increasingly global world of information. Google and Amazon have redefined the way we search for information and acquire books, digital content and other resources. Libraries in all organizations face stiff competition but have huge potential to deliver new services more effectively and efficiently. Libraries already have significant IT investments that can almost certainly be operated better. In addition, there is a new generation of technologies to be exploited.



Why we do it

We are committed to libraries and want to contribute to their success. We believe the library function is often seriously undervalued. A library can, not only play a larger role in the communities it serves, but also contribute more to meeting the strategic goals of its parent organisation.

Why use Ken Chad Consulting?

Few organisations have the expertise or capacity to get to grips with the library automation industry as well as the complex and strategic nature of the wider information industry and the Web.

We provide the additional capacity and expertise to enable service improvement and efficiencies to be gained more quickly and at lower cost. Unlike generic consulting companies we have in-depth experience and understanding of the library and information sector. We combine that with a detailed, strategic and business understanding of the related technologies. These assets mean we can work with you to transform your library and information services whilst at the same time enabling you to deliver major efficiencies.

How we can help

Virtually all libraries can use IT more effectively and imaginatively. We are well placed to help. We have an unrivalled combination of practical experience in libraries and their parent organisations, together with a sound understanding of information technology and business. Naturally organisations have their own goals and agendas so we work flexibly, adapting to your requirements.

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