UCLA College Library

How-to Guides

Thinking Critically about Web 2.0 and Beyond

by Esther Grassian, UCLA College Library

Social networking sites, blogs, wikis, virtual worlds, mashups, and filesharing sites of all kinds, etc. offer many opportunities for collaboration, global community, personal connection, creativity and enterprise, but not all sources are equally valuable or reliable. Here are some points to consider when entering or using these and other tools and environments yet to come.

Content & Evaluation

- Who is the intended audience?
- What is the purpose of the site (e.g., news, information/factual, entertainment, social connection, opinion, education, experimentation, research, training, sales, marketing/advertising, recruitment, etc.)?
- What sorts of information or data does it contain?
- To what extent does the site fulfill its intended purpose?
- How valuable or useful is the site or item?
- Is the site restricted to a particular group or category (e.g., over 18, college students, teenagers, employees of a particular company, organization or institution)?
- If there are restrictions or usage regulations, how are they enforced?
- What is the purpose of individual items, collections of items or areas within the site?
- Do participants retain intellectual property rights over items or areas mounted or created on the site?
- Can items within the site be copied and utilized freely?
- How accurate are replicas or purported representations on a site or within a particular area?
- How accurate is the information regarding the site, area, individual items or individual participants?
- Are links provided to additional information within or outside the site?
- Are the links comprehensive or do they just provide a sampling?
- How are the links selected?
- Is there an appropriate range of links to other useful sites and help?

Source & Date

- Who created the site?
- Who owns the site?
- Who regulates the site?
- Are there rules or standards regarding the site and items or areas mounted, created, or utilized on the site?
- Is there a reporting mechanism in place regarding violation of rules and standards?
- Who is the author/creator/producer of individual items, collections of items or areas within the site?
- Can the identity of sponsors/authors/creators/producers be verified? If so, how?
- Can all users modify items or areas within the site, or just a restricted group of users, or just the author/creator of the item, or just the site owner, or no one?
- Can all users comment on, add tags or other identifiers, upload items, or link to other items within or outside the site, or just a restricted group of users, just the author/creator of the item, just the site owner, or no one?
- Must those who modify, comment on, add tags or other identifiers, upload items or link to other

items within or outside the site identify themselves, and if so, how?
- Are site or item uploads, modifications and other changes identified by date and time?
- Is information freely available about the site and individual items or areas within the site?
- Is up to date contact information provided for the site and for individual items and areas?
- What is the point of view of the current site owner(s)?
- What is the point of view, if any, of specific areas or items within the site?
- When was the site mounted?
- When were individual items or areas created or mounted?
- Are permissions needed in order to share items on the site? If so, how are they verified?
- How up to date are links, tags, and other data regarding the site?
- How up to date are links, tags and other data regarding individual items or areas?

Structure

- How well does the site structure fulfill its purpose?
- How well does the structure of individual areas of a site fulfill its purpose?
- How well does the site operate?
  - Does the site require software or plugin downloads?
  - Do items download or resolve within an acceptable period of time?
  - What sort of hardware and software are required for minimal and for recommended use?
- Are users required to register for the site?
- What sort of identification is required, if any, in order to register for the site?
- If identification is required, how is it verified and by whom?
- Are there age-specific and age-appropriate areas on the site, and if so, how is entry to them regulated?
- Is parental permission required for registration or use by prospective underage users, and if so, how is it verified?
- How is privacy protected?
- Are users required to agree to site regulations and requirements?
- Is a privacy policy clearly stated on the site and readily available?
- Are hardware and software requirements for usage sufficiently detailed and up to date?
- Is there a fee for overall participation or use of the site or individual items or areas?
- Are there other fees in addition to overall participation/usage, and if so, are they optional or required?
- Are there time limits on usage or fees tied to time spent on the site?
- Who sets the fees and how are they paid?
- If credit cards can be utilized, how is personal information protected?
- Is the site easily navigable?
- How do participants move around within the site or within a particular area of the site?
- Is the site as a whole easily navigable?
- Is a site map provided or are there other detailed means of viewing and moving around within the site as a whole?
- Are specific areas within the site easily navigable?
- Is individual usage tracked within the site or within particular areas?
  - If so, how is this information utilized?
  - Who can utilize this information?
  - How is it protected?
- Are there guidelines or requirements regarding visual representations on the site or within particular areas or are authors/creators/sponsors allowed free rein?
- Do visual representations of any kind (graphics, videos, etc.) add to or detract from the site, from particular areas, or from individual items or personae?
- If tags are utilized to identify topics of items...
  - Are they folksonomic (created by individuals) or based on a controlled vocabulary or thesaurus of agreed upon subject terms? (**Note:** Check with librarians for examples of controlled vocabularies developed to categorize books, articles, films, and many other types

of materials.)
- If folksonomic terms are utilized, are they grouped into like "clusters"?
- If so, are there criteria for identifying and selecting clusters?
- Who decides on which terms or groupings to use and which folksonomic terms belong within each cluster?
- Is online help available, and if so, how useful and extensive is it?
- Is advertising permitted?
  - If so, who solicits and selects advertisers?
  - Are there criteria for selecting or rejecting advertisers?
  - Are there regulations regarding the content, format, size and other features of particular ads?
  - If ads are permitted, how obtrusive are they?
- Is a site search or site map provided?

References

Dezuanni, Michael. Media at School. *The Courier Mail* [Australia] 1 Aug 2006: 40.

Feld, Brad. Feld Thoughts: Lack of Critical Thinking. 17 Aug 2006.
http://www.feld.com/blog/archives/001912.html

Grassian, Esther. Thinking Critically About World Wide Web Resources. Jun 1995.
http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/college/help/critical/index.htm

_____. Thinking Critically About Discipline-Based World Wide Resources. 10 Oct 1997.
http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/college/help/critical/discipline.htm

Maness, Jack M. Library 2.0 Theory: Web 2.0 and Its Implications for Libraries. 29 Jun 2006
http://www.webology.ir/2006/v3n2/a25.html

O'Reilley, Tim. What Is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software. 30 Sep 2005.
http://www.oreillynet.com/lpt/a/6228

Created by Esther Grassian, 10/9/06.
Permission is granted for unlimited non-commercial use of this guide.