

NEW TECHNOLOGIES, NEW PROFESSIONALS

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Biography:

Nicholas Robinson graduated in Library and Information Science at the University of Granada, Spain. He has worked in the documentation department of a local newspaper, *El Ideal*, and collaborated occasionally as a journalist for the Culture section. He has also worked on Information Retrieval and is member of the Spanish Translation Team of IFLA Express. Currently, he is a member of EC3, a research group at the University of Granada, and writes for the librarians' journal *Mi Biblioteca*. He is a member of the executive board of the Andalusian Association of Information Professionals. Nicholas is also the author of "docu ¿qué?", an Internet blog (<http://entreolasdeinformacion.blogspot.com>). He is currently interested in the field of scholarly communication.

Abstract:

As Internet develops itself continuously, new technologies arise. These new technologies not only create new sources of information (such as websites), but also influence the way people communicate with each other (blogs, wikis, social networks, for instance). This new environment gives rise to new opportunities for Information Professionals and substantially changes the librarian's work. New Professionals are perfect candidates to fulfill the new career profiles as they are "digital natives" and - for the first time - their technological skills make them able to compete with senior professionals developing their careers.

In this paper we analyze the changes new technologies have brought to information communication and we review new career profiles that are appearing as a consequence of all these changes. We discuss some of the changes that Web 2.0 has brought to public libraries and how new professionals can take advantage of them showing the success stories of some Spanish New Professionals. Also we examine the transformation of scholarly communication with the appearance of Web 2.0 tools and illustrate the new career profiles that are appearing as a consequence with success stories.

1. Introduction

Since Tim O'Reilly (2005) coined the term Web 2.0 and Michael Casey (2005) talked for the first time about Library 2.0, librarians have found themselves snowed under with lots of new

concepts associated with technology that have made substantial changes to their daily work. During the last few years, information professionals have been overwhelmed by the constant need to update themselves, trying to keep up with new trends and trying to understand how these changes affect the way users communicate.

All of this effort has - in some cases - become an obsession (Blyberg, 2008), creating two streams. On the one hand, those professionals who think of new technologies as a revolution which changes the profession into something different where librarians are connected to their users through social networks, talking to them through a blog, sharing links instead of sharing books and answering users' requests instantly through a chat. And those who think that technology doesn't have such a big impact on the library's objective (Annoyed Librarian, 2008) of serving the community's information needs without having to put much stress on how users interact with each other.

In this paper, we try to explore a middle way between these two views. We discuss how technology might affect new professionals and whether new career profiles are possible in this ever-changing environment. We discuss the importance of trying to satisfy users' needs and keep up with changes in their behavior when they search for information or when they communicate. Finally, we show three success stories in Spain of New Professionals who have been able to discover niches in the profession which weren't covered; identifying needs that hadn't been satisfied. Each case will illustrate a field of endeavor - libraries, academic research and business - in order to demonstrate that new career profiles arise no matter the institution we work for.

2. Traditional library vs. Library 2.0

Nowadays, when someone mentions the words "new technologies", we quickly think about Internet, blogs, wikis, social networks and all that Web 2.0 represents. The incredible outburst of new technologies has made such an impact on our lives that it blinkers us in many ways, not letting us get a whole picture of how society is evolving and what role librarians and information professionals should fulfill.

Traditionally, libraries have been conceived as closed spaces where users would turn up whenever they had the need for information. Librarians would sit at their desks and wait for users to come to them. With Library 2.0, we talk about open spaces, interacting with users no matter where they are (Casey, 2006). We think of it as a new philosophy, a revolution which changes completely the perspective not just of librarians, but also of the view people have of librarians. It sounds so good that we've become obsessed in some ways, theorizing about what Library 2.0 really means (Maness, 2006). We have even discussed what it is and what it isn't (Blyberg, 2008), as if a new paradigm had arisen and changed the whole profession thanks to the development of some new tools. But, has such a big change really taken place? Are there such big differences between then and now? Must we, as new professionals, adopt a new role?

Well, if we have a close look at what happens around us, the answer to all of these questions would be: yes and no. In many ways, libraries still do what they did just twenty years ago. These new technologies are no more than tools that enable us to get to our users in easier

ways. In other words, libraries were closed spaces before not because librarians weren't interested in their community, but because they didn't have the tools to reach their customers. The Internet has become a great opportunity for the expansion of library services, many of them being referred to now as web-based library services (Maness, 2006). But nevertheless, the librarian's role and the library's goal haven't changed. Quoting Keith Fiels, executive director of ALA (Robinson, 2008):

"My take is that libraries still do the things they did a hundred years ago but all these things [technology] have been added on top of it."

Understanding the opportunities, but also the limitations technology gives us; helps us to develop a more critical view of how to make the best of them in order to become successful professionals. Another reason why it is important to maintain a critical view is because many librarians, in order to keep up with all these new tools; sign up for everything, without really thinking whether they need them or not. It is important always to keep in mind that most of these tools were not developed for libraries, so we always have to focus on what it is we want to achieve when we use them.

In this sense, Meredith Farkas (2009) made a very illuminating analysis of the main reasons that 2.0 web technology fails when applied to library services. These four reasons can be summarized as follows:

- Normally, this type of initiative is not linked to the institution's goals and is not reflected in the library's policy.
- Many libraries start using these services just to show they are "cool" without being really interested in them, but to show they know about them.
- In many cases, they are just the "toy" of one or other of the employees and have nothing to do with the library as an institution.
- Creating a blog takes just five minutes. The difficult thing is maintaining it.

But the truth is technology has changed how our users behave when they seek information and how they interact with each other. Nowadays, libraries are not the main place where they can satisfy their need for information; they do it through the Internet. Through Google, in particular. And they like to do it by themselves. Also, users have become more demanding: they don't want you just to give them the information they seek; they want it to be accurate, the latest, and they want it now and for free. But don't expect them to go all the way to the library, and if they are already in the library, don't expect them to get up from their computer screen and walk all the way to the reference desk. Instead they'll ask their colleagues through Messenger or they'll send an email or even publish a comment on their Facebook profile.

These changes mean a great opportunity for New Professionals as we are "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001) and we also behave in this way when we search for information or communicate among ourselves. So, the answer to the big question "Do we really need new professionals in this ever changing environment?" Is "Yes", we certainly do, and we are perfectly capable of developing new strategies to achieve our main goal of serving our community.

3. What's the profile of these New Professionals?

New professionals should be proactive and should always be looking for ways to improve the services they provide and to make sure their customers are satisfied. To illustrate the profile of these new professionals, I'll talk about the public library at Muskiz (Juárez-Urquijo, 2008), a village near Bilbao.

This library is small, it doesn't even have its own building but shares one with another public institution. In 2004 they created their website using Web 2.0 tools and free open source software exclusively as they couldn't afford to make a big investment in it. Two years later they decided to go further. They wanted to collaborate with other public libraries from the same region. The first problem they found was that most of them had no website. So, as they couldn't force them to develop one, they adopted a marketing strategy, they created a group in Yahoo! for librarians from the region and offered to help them to develop their own web based services. In this way, libraries started to create their own content and even their own blogs, which led to the creation of a network of services which resulted in a webpage which shows the latest book recommendations of the library network.

4. Three Success Stories

As we have seen in this example, librarians identified a niche of information need that they hadn't covered and, using new technologies, creatively developed a service that would satisfy this information need.

But we can go further and talk about new career profiles that we, as new professionals, can create and fulfill. We are not talking here about new types of librarian but of other kinds of information professionals that complement and complete the librarian's job in many ways. In this case, we'll tell three success stories of New Professionals who have developed by themselves new career profiles using new technologies in some way or other.

The first story will be centered on public libraries and how they've demanded a new profile and have gone looking until they found it. The second story is about a New Professional who has identified a market niche that wasn't filled and has developed his own business. Finally, the last story isn't strictly related to new technologies, but new technologies enable this New Professional to work from his own house.

4.1. Public Libraries: Catuxa and her blog

Catuxa Seoane is one of the authors of one of the most important blogs¹ on Library and Information Science in Spain and South America. It is more than six years old and it is a point of reference for any professional who wants to be updated on the latest news and trends related with our profession. Three years ago she received a call from the Council of the north-western Spanish city of La Coruña asking her to work for them as they wanted to create a public library

¹ Deakiallí Documental: <http://www.deakialli.com/>

blog network² and wanted her to coordinate it. Using her blog as a calling card she has been able to find a job doing what she likes to do without even having to go out and look for it. She doesn't work directly for the council, but for a company which provides services to the library community.

Recently, she has been promoted and now she coordinates the New Technologies and Virtual Services Department in the Municipal Libraries Service of La Coruña.

4.2. Business: Doing it by yourself

Javier Leiva is the owner of Catorze³, a company which works in what he calls "online reputation". They develop tools for companies to advertise themselves. This goes from creating websites, to developing wikis, blogs or whatever suits the needs of the company. One of their latest services has been to cover Fesabid 2009⁴, the Biannual Spanish Library and Information Professionals Congress which took place last May in Zaragoza. In every case, what they do is:

- Firstly, they identify the needs of the company,
- Then they elaborate a strategy defining: objectives, tools and process,
- They propose their methodology,
- They try to collaborate in the early stages of the project, even if they don't have to in order to familiarize with the products the company sells.
- Finally, they implement the project they've designed.

4.3. Research: Making yourself worth it

The last success story is about Daniel Torres and how he obtained his current job. Daniel is a member of a research group in the University of Granada; EC3, Science and Scientific Communication Evaluation⁵. This research group works primarily on bibliometrics and scholarly communication, they also work with different research institutions such as universities and hospitals, elaborating reports about their efficiency and productivity in research. In a project with the University of Navarre that the research group had contracted through a Consultancy, he got involved in such a way that he decided to write his thesis about the tools they elaborated to evaluate the research production of CIMA⁶ (a university medical laboratory). When he asked the institution for permission, they became interested in the

²<https://aytolacoruna.es:8002/servlet/Satellite?c=Page&pagename=Bibliotecas/Page/Portada&rendermode=preview&cid=1108122886259>

³ <http://www.catorze.com/>

⁴ <http://www.fesabid.org/zaragoza2009/>

⁵ <http://ec3.ugr.es>

⁶ Centro de Investigación Médica Aplicada, Universidad de Navarra: <http://www.cima.es/>

project, financed it and encouraged him to create a whole information system and a database to manage the researchers' activity. Since then he has been working for them, maintaining the information system, giving courses to researchers on how to design their professional careers, evaluating journals and collaborating with the library. At the same time he is developing his own career as a researcher in the University of Granada⁷.

Daniel works from Granada and goes to Pamplona for only one month per year, he does the rest of his work through the Internet.

5. Conclusions

As we've seen with the many examples in this paper, New Professionals are making a real impact on the profession and, thanks to new technologies; they are being able to reach places others haven't been to before.

Although, in order to get that far, you need a dose of creativity and you need to maintain a very optimistic, enthusiastic attitude. New Professionals can only discover new work niches by searching for information needs that haven't been satisfied and demonstrating they have the most suitable profile to fulfill the new position.

All the examples we've given do have one thing in common. In each case, it has been individuals who have taken the initiative, so we can't talk about a general transformation of the profession. The profiles we have shown are probably exclusive to these individual professionals, but they do represent an encouraging start for a new generation of library and information professionals.

⁷ The research group has a blog that keeps you updated on the activities they do:
<http://ec3noticias.blogspot.com/>

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