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Of Facebook, Twitter and Social Networking Sites

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Little Red Herrings — Of Facebook, Twitter and Social Networking Sites

by **Mark Y. Herring** (Dean of Library Services, Dacus Library, Winthrop University) <herringm@winthrop.edu>

For those who have read even one of my musings, it will come as no surprise that I find **Facebook**, **Twitter**, social networking sites (SNS), and the rest of Webology less than inspiring. If you had read nothing other than the screed I blathered about **Google** a few columns back, you'd know that I find all this talk about the Web replacing libraries more than a little silly; I find it downright idiotic. Still, one must keep an open mind.

So, yes, I have a **Facebook** account, I tweet from time to time (but only about things I think others would like to know, such as library-related news and not about the gas I passed at noon), own an **iPhone**, have recently begun to blog, and have spent much of the summer preparing to teach a class this fall using **Kindles** and whatever can be delivered thereon. Some might consider this the height of hypocrisy: caviling about the Web but using it to its fullest extent. Call it rationalization, but I see using the Web while complaining about its defects the same as having an annual physical while harping about healthcare. Furthermore, how is one ever to make sense of all this without investigating whether Web 2.0 can be made useful for humans 1.0?

The **iPhone** I use is like any other phone/planner I have owned. I have found it marginally better than previous such phones. For reasons that remain a mystery to me, I could never get my email on prior phones in real-time or even near real-time. The **iPhone** is an improvement in that regard. **Apple** products do work as advertized, something I cannot say about other technologies I've used. So far, I have found **Twitter** interesting but a bit too narcissistic for my tastes. Still, I plan to have my students use it in the class this fall and perhaps tweet something other than their last date, beer, or the bug they saw on the sidewalk while walking to class. I'm not overly optimistic on this count. Getting them to read at all is a problem, so having them tweet about what they've read may well be impossible. Still, I'm going to make the effort.

My **Facebook** experience grew out of my desire to see the library have a **Facebook** account. We tried this with **MySpace**, and while it didn't really fail, it never really got much of a Webhold, so to say. Our new **Facebook** page is up, and we added a blog to it this summer. (You can find mine at *www.winthrop.edu*; click on the "Library News" link. Be sure to sign up for our feeds.) The blogging/**Facebook** updating has been more interesting but it's all very new and perhaps too early to say what effect it will have, if any, on whatever else we do. We added an instant message feature last year to our Webpage and while it's being used, it's not being used as much as we hoped.

All in all, Web 2.0 has been a little underwhelming. I attribute this lackluster unveiling to something I have done wrong — heaven forbid that it be something wrong with the Web or its ability to deliver! I continue to hope it will improve as time goes on. I do find it an additional bit of work for everyone involved: those who maintain the page, those who blog, our photographer who shoots our daily photo, and so on. I happen to be blessed with some very talented folks who are interested in this, too, and who have the technical know-how to bring it about. If anyone can make it successful, they can and likely in spite of me.

All of this comes at an interesting time. The dean at **Southern Methodist University** (**Jose A. Bowen**) has come out asking *his* colleagues to "teach naked"; that is, to please yank the computers from the classroom and thus remove the ennui.[1] His view is that things like **Power-Point** and the like are too much a crutch and so have added boredom to the classroom, not innovation and energy. I feel his pain. On the other hand, I think *any* new accoutrement to the classroom is likely to run the risk of creating more boredom than energy if it becomes a crutch. Heaven knows the tried (and trying) lecture has killed more than one student (not to mention the lecturer himself) of boredom. But I understand where the dean is coming from and the point that he's trying to make.

As I write about these new technologies, word comes across my desk that students aren't as tech-savvy as we think.[2] This is not really new, but the study proving it again is. It should give those who wag their fingers and tell us that **Google** is everything (see **Jeff Jarvis's** new hagiography, *What Would Google Do?* if you don't believe me) pause.

It doubtless will not slow down Web 2.0 supporters, however, because too much has been invested in all this to make it work. It's like the ongoing slip-ups of eBooks and the never-say-die efforts of those who refuse to take no for an answer. We'll have eBooks at some future date; and at some even more future date, they'll sort of work fine, if we don't kill off reading altogether in the process. If you can't read the writing on the wall about all this Web stuff, it's this: if you're a librarian, your job is in jeopardy, perhaps not this year, but certainly in the next seven to ten unless something drastic happens. Everyone says they love libraries, but no one wants to fund them. And *everyone* isn't the right pronoun anyway. More and more people are saying libraries are unnecessary, obsolete, and too expensive. Some have even said we have to "blow them up," meaning they're useless buildings and need to be replaced with **Google** or **Kindles** or a combination of both. Others tell us we need to "get over" books. When **OSU's** *director* of libraries in concert with the administration "culled" about 275,000 books, faculty and students rose up to complain. They were told to get over books.[3] Books are démodé, oh-sooo last year; and so is Thinking 0.5. The coming Thinking 2.0 in the next two or ten or fifty years is that nanotechnology will make computers so small they can connect with our neurons or replace our synapses. Famed Futurologist, **Ian Pearson**, contends that nanotechnologies will, by 2040, back up all our brains, so dying "won't be a major career problem." Wow, wouldn't you just love to work for that guy! All of which is to say that the revolution is underway. Make no mistake about it: I love technology when it works and how much easier it *can* make things. But I'm troubled by this technology-for-its- own sake onslaught.

But let's not end on an unhappy note. At the same time all this has been going on, **Facts on File** is taking a chance on me to come up with a book on the legal issues of social networking

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Forgot again! **Phil Davis** <pmd8@cornell.edu> is speaking at the **2009 Charleston Conference** as one of our plenary speakers and I wonder what his new **ah-ha moments** will be! We have a jam-packed schedule again this year with awesome speakers including **Ivy Anderson** (California Digital Library), **Jane Burke** (Serials Solutions), a panel on **Google** and the future of libraries, **David Lankes** (Syracuse University), **David Nicholas** (University College London, **Chris Warnock** (ebrary), **Michael Stephens** (Dominican University), and **Kevin Smith** (Duke University). And that's just a small number of our speakers. Be sure and look at the full program online ***http://www.katina.info/conference.***

Well, besides spending a few weeks in the hospital nursing my husband for his hip replacement surgery, we spent over two weeks in Scotland this summer. First stop was the **Fiesole Collection Development Retreat** in Glasgow. The theme of the Retreat was **"Reshaping Library Content : Building e-Collections and Accessing Global Resources."** Special kudos to **Derek Law** and **April Wood**s and the entire city of Glasgow for the wonderful arrangements and welcome reception! There were many excellent papers. Read most of them at *http://digital.casalini.it/retreat.*

sites. These fall into two neat categories, access and liability. Access issues have to do with governments, schools, businesses or any other entity denying folks their 'inalienable' rights to access **Facebook**, **Twitter**, **Bebo**, **YouTube**, or any other SNS or SNS-type entity. Liability issues revolve around SNS creating, allowing or even abetting illegal activity. It can be as obvious as the whole **Craigslist** brouhaha that ended in murder, or it can be less than obvious as when posted personal profiles sink careers or when admissions officers check that National Merit's **Facebook** page only to find nude or semi-nude photos. The obvious court cases include **DOPA**, **CIPA** and so on, but there are others, to be sure.

So I call on all of you to send me your examples. I want to put together the most comprehensive compilation I can, and I can do that so much better by relying on the genius of crowds, or the far and madding crowds, or the trailing crowds of glory — no, wait, that's clouds. Never mind. Anyway, you get my drift. I can be reached at <herringm@winthrop.edu>, on **Facebook** or **Twitter** (Kipper56).

In case you're wondering, I already posted this in various Web-based places and am now doing so in print, too. It will be interesting to see which medium draws the most notice. I'll keep your posted, an old phrase that now has a very tech-savvy ring to it, huh? 🐟

Endnotes
1. Young, Jeffrey R. (July 20, 2009). "When Computers Leave Classrooms, So Does Boredom." *Chronicle of Higher Education*. http://chronicle.com/article/Teach-Naked-Effort-Strips/47398. Accessed and viewed August 2009.

2. Hendry, Erica R. (July 20, 2009). "Students May Not Be as software-Savvy as they think, Study Says." *Chronicle of Higher Education*. http://chronicle.com/blogPost/Students-May-Not-Be-as-Soft/7276. Accessed and viewed August 2009.

3. Howard, Jennifer. (May 13, 2009). "Library Protestors to Ohio State U.: Digital's OK but Save Our Books!" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. http://chronicle.com/blogPost/Library-Protesters-to-Ohio/7161. Accessed and viewed August 2009.

Forgot! What a great **Rumor**! About **another marriage**! **Dennis Brunning** <dennis.brunning@gmail.com> wore a tuxedo to his daughter's wedding! I was searching for a picture but couldn't dig one up. Can you? In the meantime, see this issue for **Dennis**' latest column. It's about the death of the Internet, some thoughts about **Amazon's Kindle**, blogging, and a few other things, p.68, and also p.52 for his interview with **Steve Bosch**.

Speaking of **Dennis**' column, I noticed that he mentions the latest **Nicholson Baker** article in *The New Yorker* (August 3, 2009)

about the **Kindle**. "A New Page: Can Kindle really improve on the book?" I have to admit that, being *Against the Grain* myself, I find it refreshing to hear some circumspection regarding the eBook. It's not that the eBook is bad, it's just that, to advocate that the eBook will or should totally REPLACE the printed book, is, frankly, unrealistic and ignores the problem of preservation in the digital arena. *http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/8/03/0908003fa_fact_bak…*

Speaking of which, I just got an advanced reading copy of *The Case for Books: Past, Present, and Future* by none other than **Robert Darnton** who is the director of the **Harvard University Library,** founder of **Gutenberg-e**, and author of a regular column in *The New York Review of Books* as well as countless other monographs. Getting up on my hobby horse again, I will quote from **Bill Gates** (quoted in **Robert Darnton**'s book): "Reading off the screen is still vastly inferior to reading off of paper. Even I, who have these expensive screens and fancy myself as a pioneer of this Web Lifestyle, when it comes to something over about four or five pages, I print it out and I like to have it to carry around with me and annotate. And it's quite a hurdle for technology to achieve to match that level of usability." (p.69). At this point in the development of the technology, I have to agree.

While we are still talking about books, I want to call your attention to another one. *Books as History: the Importance of Books Beyond*