A "Wall" By Any Other Name Remains Equally Inspired?

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This year’s keynote speaker was none other than our own Katina Strauch. Katina’s presentation, “All I Need to Know I Learned at the Charleston Conference” was, as you’d expect, thought-provoking and engaging. With the help of Stacey Devine, Assistant Head of Acquisitions and Rapid Cataloging at the Northwestern University Library, we’re working on a Website to host presentations, past programs, and other content from earlier Timberlines — I’ll let you know when Katina’s presentation, as well as others, are up and available.

The 2010 conference was also a first in that Camila Alire, ALA President, was in attendance and gave welcoming remarks. In addition, Molly Raphael, now ALA President-elect, was able to join us as well.

The complete 2010 program is available for viewing at our main Website, libweb.uoregon.edu/ec/aitl.

A couple of years ago someone referred to us as a “boutique conference,” and initially I resented the remark. The more I thought about it, though, I decided it wasn’t such a bad reference after all. We work very hard to provide the best possible conference experience, particularly regarding the program content (it’s not all skiing and St. Bernards). So, if you’re interested in a meeting somewhat off the beaten path, keep us in mind. Feel free to contact me with any questions. I hope to see you on the Mountain next May!

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For those who keep up with such things, it now appears that the whole social network craze is well, a little forced, postured, and otherwise created out of thin air. It’s not unlike the so-called “HPOA Girl” who quit her job using a dry-erase board and caused an Internet sensation. Jay Leno, Steven Colbert, “Good Morning America,” et al, all wanted her on board. Everyone shook their heads in a knowing way; we hear you sister, and we wish we had done that. We all discovered that it was all postured from the beginning by a Website known for its antics (http://bit.ly/bvXGIM). While working on another project I ran across some data that might surprise readers about the “age” of the so-called social networking era.

According to Royal Pingdom in a study done earlier this year (http://bit.ly/bPpWOJ), it would appear that the average social networking user is a geezer, or she may as well be. In a study of 19 social networking sites, fully one quarter are 35-44, if you stretch that to 55, that age bracket accounts for nearly 45% of all users. And the female pronoun above is not merely for the sake of politi cal correctness: more women than men use social networks.

It doesn’t end there, either. The social network one uses correlates to one’s age. If you have a Bebo account, you’re probably 17 years or older. On the other hand, if you have a Facebook or Twitter account, you are likely to be 35 years of age, or older. The average age of a Facebook, Digg, StumbleUpon, Twitter, Delicious, LinkedIn or Classmates user is thirty-eight, or older. Put your teeth continued on page 78

Little Red Herrings — A “Wall” by Any Other Name Remains Equally Insipid?

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

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back in. Members of the last two in the list are likely to be over 44 years of age. I SAID, MEMBERS OF THE LAST... okay, you get the picture. Let me hasten to add that of the 19 social networking-type sites examined in this study, not one site had 18-24 year olds as the dominant age group. Part of that is surely because the age bracket spans 7 years and not 10, as the other bracket snapshots do. But part of it must be because many of those that age are simply not on these sites, and this list contains the most popular ones floating about in cyberspace. I’m not saying that teens are not using these sites. Of course they are. But the sites are predominantly populated by many who have eyes near, at, or over 40.

Yes, yes, I know. There are lies, damned lies, and statistics. But it does cause one to ponder the meaning behind the numbers. You’ll note, as did I, that not one of the ages mentioned is likely to be in college. Twenty-eight year olds are very likely to be employed … and still living at home. But 40+ year olds really are likely to be in the workforce and living on their own. We hear a great deal these days about reaching out to youth and going where they are. It would appear that where they are isn’t necessarily online. Getting to them may not be as easy as we thought.

It also raises the question of just how effective such sites are for the age group we’re hoping to reach. Many libraries, including the one in which I work, have Facebook and Twitter accounts. In fact, I am, as much as anyone, one of the reasons why we have those accounts. But from recent studies, it appears getting at the age group we want may not be as easy as pointing and clicking. It may also mean that making your library online “hip” is very effective if your students are 35 or older. If they are between the ages of 18 and 22 years of age — the age of most college students — perhaps not so much. It also may have something to say about moving too much of the teaching apparatus to the social networking arena until we are sure those we hope to teach will have found that arena after all. (Maybe they can “Google” us?)

More studies will have to be done and will have to come to the same conclusions as these before I am willing to saw off the social networking limb from the tree of knowledge. Still, it is enough to make me ask one small but seemingly important question:

If social networking users are all geezers (or thereabouts), who are we doing all this for?