GUIDE TO MANAGING HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

Involving People

Web 2.0 and social media

The term Web 2.0 has been used since 2004 to refer to applications that allow people without technical knowledge to create, publish and share content online including information, photographs, audio and video files and to participate in collaborative tasks online.

Social media refers to user-created audio, video, text, images and multimedia published or shared in a social environment.

Creating, publishing and sharing content and also using information and media in different ways is a feature of Web 2.0 and social media sites.

Networking opportunities have increased with the advent of electronic forums and an increasing variety of social media tools including blogs (web logs) and image sharing sites. A selection of web 2.0 sites and applications are provided below.

Blogs
Blogs or web logs are a good way to record information as it happens - they can be described as a web diary or journal. Because blogs are so easy to set up they are increasingly used on the Internet by people recording their views on a variety of subjects, recording information about a holiday etc.

Blogger – www.blogger.com – is one of many blog hosting sites online. It is easy to join and create a blog choosing from a range of available templates. The *Information technology and local history* blog – http://itlochist.blogspot.com/ - is an example of a *Blogger* blog. Created to record information about a number of different IT projects, it is not a manual but should help people undertaking similar projects or provide ideas for projects.

Each post (block of information or message) is given a label which helps readers of the blog locate information on a specific topic. Labels can be allocated to each posts and the list of labels acts as a contents guide to posts in the blog.

At the end of each post in a blog there is often a section where comments can be made about the information in the post. Readers will however need to be logged into the blog hosting program to post a comment.

RSS
RSS (various explanations including Rich Site Summary or Really Simple Syndication) allows users to receive content feeds from sites where information is frequently added, particularly in blogs and news sites. Additional information explaining RSS is available at *What is RSS? RSS explained* – http://www.whatisrss.com/.

Increasingly Internet users are using RSS feed readers, such as Google Reader – http://www.google.com/reader, to keep track of new postings in sites such as blogs. Recent editions of browsers show a small square orange symbol the browser tool bar when a site or page has an RSS feed. Clicking this symbol allows users to subscribe to a blog directly using an RSS reader. Alternatively browsers allow links to be made directly from a site using RSS to a computer – for example to the Live Bookmark option in *Firefox* and Microsoft feeds section in *Explorer*.

Websites using RSS also include a section where the RSS link or symbol can be used to subscribe to feeds from the site.

 The advantage of using an RSS reader or link to a site such as a blog is that you can be alerted whenever new information is posted in the blog without the need of having to regularly check the blog itself.

Tagging
Tagging is a way of organising and locating information on the Internet by designating tags (descriptors or subject headings) to describe content. The ability to tag items is a feature of Web 2.0 applications.

Some organisations allow users to their own add tags to database records. The Powerhouse Museum is one such organisation, http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/.

Wikis
A wiki is a collaborative website that can be added to or edited by anyone provided with permission to do so. The best known wiki is Wikipedia – http://en.wikipedia.org – a collaborative reference source created by anyone in the world wishing to add information on a topic. Terms in articles in wikis contain links to the same term in other articles in the wiki and also to other online resources. There are many programs available online, including a number of free programs, enabling the establishment of wikis.

Photo sharing online
There are now Internet tools that allow images to be shared online. This feature can be useful for allowing images taken of an event or of heritage sites to be made available to a wider audience. Flickr – www.flikr.com – is one such site. Tools used with Flickr can create slideshows and other image features to be added to a website or blog providing an interesting way to display images stored in Flickr.

My Connected Community – http://mc2.vicnet.net.au – also provides a photo sharing option for members of online communities to share images online.

YouTube
YouTube – http://www.youtube.com/ - is a site where people can upload, watch and share videos. Once a video has been uploaded the link to the video can be inserted in another website or emailed to those who may be interested. It can also be found independently by anyone using the YouTube site.

Del.icio.us
Del.icio.us – www.delicious.com – is a social bookmaking website allowing users to store links to their favourite websites in one place enabling them to be accessed from any computer.

LibraryThing
LibraryThing – www.librarything.com – allows users to catalogue their books online. An online catalogue of books can be created by selecting records for titles from almost 700 library catalogues and catalogues of book sellers such as Amazon. A link can then be made from this specifically created online catalogue to a website allowing others to view information about the books. *LibraryThing* also allows users to connect with other users with similar reading interests.

Twitter
Twitter – http://twitter.com – is a social networking service that could be referred to as mini-blog. It allows users to send text based messages (posts) up to 140 characters in length via the Internet or mobile phone or instant messaging system.

Facebook
Facebook – www.facebook.com – is a popular social network service that connects people with others and allows the publishing of text, images, video and links online. Users set up a profile with information about themselves. Other users can request to become a Friend of the person who set up the profile. Friends can then add comments to content on the profile page.

Online management systems
Google Docs – http://docs.google.com – and Zoho Docs – www.zoho.com – provide online office management systems for word processing, spreadsheets and presentations. Documents can be created online or files created on a desktop computer can be loaded into the office management system to be edited or viewed on any computer or Internet device. A number of people with access to the online files can contribute directly to the project.

Google maps
Google maps – http://maps.google.com – allow users to view maps in a variety of formats including conventional map view or satellite view and if the Google Earth plug in is downloaded a three dimensional view of streets. Users can get directions from point A to Point B including distance and approximate travel time. They can also designate a section of a map or design a route map to be saved as a link in a website or email for others to view. Map sections can also be saved as pdf files to be printed or linked to websites.

Content created by many of the above applications can be viewed by anyone using the Internet but in order to create or edit content or add comments or tags (depending on the application) you need to join the site by completing an online form and creating a user name (in some cases this is an email address) and password.

A number of organisations have added blogs and or wikis to their sites to publish additional information or information on a specific theme. Users can add comments if they wish and can also use the RSS facility to be notified when new posts are added.

RHSV news, for example, is a blog linked to the RHSV website to publish news and information of interest to users of the website that may have been received by the Society between issues of *History News*. It also provides another venue for publicising RHSV events.

A number of collecting organisations use Web 2.0 and social media applications to further promote their organisations and encourage online participation from a wider community. The Powerhouse Museum – http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/ – has been successful at doing this however it may be argued that people interested in the collections of the Powerhouse Museum may be more inclined to experiment with technology applications.

Some societies are also beginning to experiment with social media applications to further promote their organisation. It should be remembered, however, that when social media sites are used someone has to moderate comments and also ensure that information is regularly added to maintain interest in the site. In some cases regularly updating a website may be a more efficient way of making information available.