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Words to the Wise: Web Managers and Librarians Working it Out

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Words to the Wise: Web Managers and Librarians Working it Out

How Do Academic Libraries Manage to Manage Their Web Sites?

The Survey

• Surveyed 149 institutions
• Surveyed Web and Reference librarians in each
• 118 responses (40%) from 75 institutions (50%)
• Asked about:
  • Who does the Web work
  • Web committees and content authoring
  • User involvement
  • Content management systems (CMS)

The Results

Web Departments and Committees
• Nearly all have a Web department
• 75% have Web committees
• typically 7-9 members

“It is valuable to gain input from the ‘front lines’ for customizing Web site content for users.”

“Use a small group of enthusiastic librarians and staff so changes can be initiated quickly.”

“A disadvantage of using a small group might be a lack of technical expertise.”
Teamwork and its Challenges
• Consensus can slow process
• Dysfunction can occur within the group
• Web and public services librarians have different viewpoints

Centralized vs. Distributed Decision-Making
• Depends on the institution (size, librarians’ skill sets, etc.)
• Handle large and small decisions differently

Content Management Systems: Help or Hindrance?
• About half use a CMS
• 75% use for managing Web pages
• 50% use for managing databases and guides
• Most thought important for good Web site

Tips:
Include individuals who have necessary skills over political considerations.
Form more than one committee (e.g. Web site management, advising, and editing).
Define mandates and roles of authority.
Easier to “train people without skills than to motivate people without interest.”

“A ‘quality of life’ issue”
“CMS = basic requirement for Web site success”
“We’re trapped in a god-awful campus-wide CMS design”
Redesigning the Web Site
• 38% did it twice in the last 10 years
• 20% did it once
• 20% did it three times
• Over 25% continually redesigning/upgrading

What About the Users?
• 15% are doing continual usability testing
• 36% usability testing annually or a few times a year
• 49% usability testing rarely or never
• Many using or planning to implement Web 2.0 technologies

What’s the Winning Combination?
• Adequate staffing
• Good project management and transparent timelines
• Well-functioning CMS
• Balance between centralized vs. distributed work models
• Top down support
• Collaborative decision-making – valuable but time-intensive
• Acknowledge different perspectives of techies and non-techies
• Flexibility needed for constantly evolving Web work

“We are now in a perpetual state of beta”

“Face lifts rather than full-blown redesigns”

Tip: Involve users through instant messaging, blogs, wikis, Skype, “My Library” customization, tagging, Facebook and Google widgets.

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