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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

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.”

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

“‘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

“Face lifts rather than full-blown redesigns”

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

“We are now in a perpetual state of beta”