Connecting the Dots:
Social Software and
the Social Nature of Libraries

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Libraries have always been about connections. We connect people with information, we connect ideas to imaginations, and we connect individuals to communities. It's little wonder then that social software continues to be a hot item on library conference programs and throughout library-centric publications, both online and offline. Even with talk of the Web 2.0 movement,[1] and its fledgling sibling, Library 2.0,[2] social software – the connection of people to people using software and the Net – continues to factor heavily in discussions of what is now and what is to be for libraries and the broader information landscape.

Social software, succinctly defined, is "software that supports group interaction."[3] It connects the dots between people and people, between people and their interests, and between what could be and what already is. The year is 2006 and the debut of the web browser in 1993 feels like ancient history, especially for young people now enjoying (or lamenting) their first year of university. For those a little older, we've moved from a time when the web was mostly a "read-only" technology, to an era where the many can now "read-write-and-participate." But what does this really mean for libraries, information

seekers, authors and publishers? How do we make sense of the new world of blogs, wikis and tag-friendly users who dare question the practicality of our carefully chosen subject headings?

I suggest we start by opening up our collective eyes and ears and saying, "Show me the love!" That's right, folks. We're living in a time when users are actually showing their excitement for subject headings and the tags formerly known as metadata.

Metadata – imagine! A time when people are enthusiastically cataloguing and labelling books, websites, images and now video. A time when people are writing openly and honestly about books they've read, movies they've seen, politics they're concerned about, and the best and worst practices of their occupations and professions.

They're creating their own encyclopedias – laden with opinion, true – but open to the criticism of any who dare read and contribute back to the entries. And why? You rarely get rich off blogging and spending time in Wikipedia. Why would anyone want to invest time in such a hobby?

Why? Because they're *passionate*, they're *interested* and they've been given *a new toolkit*. They're passionate about their chosen professions, their hobbies, their interests, and what's

going on in the world around them. They see a benefit to connecting to other people, both within their local circle and beyond. They're interested in sharing their knowledge, experiences and opinions, and connecting on some level with others who just may be interested in connecting those very same dots.

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Hmm... Much of this sounds like what libraries have always tried to encourage and facilitate. That is, the sharing of information in a free and open environment where dialogue will root out truth, *truthiness* and downright falsehoods.[4] Where a diversity of opinion and freedoms of expression are not only respected but actively promoted and fostered. Where information literacy skills are taught in the hope that people will learn how to engage with information, the media, publishers and the academy, with an eye to understanding for themselves what makes sense and what ought to raise eyebrows.

A talented pool of library writers have come together to create what we hope will be an interesting and engaging issue of *Feliciter*. You'll learn about Wikipedia, blogs, RSS, social bookmarking, tagging and the growth of citizen journalism. Consider these topics carefully as you plot where library dots fall within the social fabric of the Internet.

Notes

1. "Web 2.0," *Wikipedia* http://en.wikipedia.org/iwki/Web2.0.
2. "Library 2.0," *Wikipedia*.
3. Christopher Allan, "Tracing the Evolution of Social Software," *Life With Alacrity*, www.lifewithalacrity.com/2004/10/tracing_the_evo.html.
4. Stephen Colbert's inventive terminology for the "quality by which a person purports to know something emotionally or instinc-tively, without regard to evidence." See "Truthiness," *Wikipedia,* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truthiness.

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