RELIEVED AT LAST: CATALOGUING WITH LIBRARYTHING

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Abstract

This paper argues that LibraryThing (LT), a cheap, user friendly, social networking cataloguing tool can also be used by big libraries to develop library collections' catalogues as well as a platform for sharing bibliographic information with other libraries. LT has always been regarded as an open software that can be used by small libraries to organize and share information about their collections. In this time when libraries are facing acute financial challenges due to limited budgets, LT can bail out many libraries by offering them a quality web-based cataloguing service despite their limited budgets. The population of LT users continues to grow steadily, an indicator that the software is being adopted by many libraries now. LT falls under Web 2.0 application. Individuals and organizations use LT to catalogue their own collections because it is simple and straight forward. The advantage of web-based social networks applications for cataloguing like LT is that they are visible on the web, and that they use a format that is known and created by users themselves and that they also allow user input. By using Z39.50 data exchanging protocol, LT users can catalogue their books by themselves and import data from other catalogues available like the Library of Congress, the British Library, the NEBIS Catalog or Amazon etc.

Keywords: Librarything; Cataloguing; Web 2.0 tools.

1. Introduction

Library Thing (LT) is a web-based open source software social cataloguing tool that is now used for organization of knowledge by individuals as well as many libraries (Van Tine & Walser, 2008; Bartley, n.d.). According to Hvass (2008), open source software is a free software that includes the original source code that was used to create it so that users can modify it to make it better for their needs. LT was originally developed and published by Tim Spalding from Portland, Maine in the United States of American in 2005. The idea behind the development of this open source software was to help individuals and small libraries catalogue and share their

bibliographic records. LT falls under Web 2.0 application examples that are used for organization of knowledge. One of the main advantages of using Open Source software is that it is open for changes that suit users needs, its low cost and absence of restrictions for using it (Boss, 2008). Individuals and organizations use LT to catalogue their own collections because it is simple and straight forward.

LT utilizes data originating from different sources like Amazon, Library of Congress and many more to produce records that users personalize with tags, ratings, and reviews. The development of LibraryThing for Libraries (LTFL) is one of the most important improvements that has enabled LT to be very useful to libraries regardless of size or type. For example, Santolaria (2009) found that 139 libraries were using LTFL. Out these 54 were academic while 79 were public libraries. The remaining 8 libraries were either special or school libraries. This, therefore, supports the argument that LT has gained the ground and can even be used by big libraries.

Libraries the world over are faced with acute shortage of financial resources that is affecting their service delivery. LT can be considered as an alternative solution to commercial software for managing library collections. LT is simple, visible on the web as compared to other library catalogs that cannot be accessed online. LT uses format created by users themselves and it allows user input. LT users can catalog their books by themselves and import data from other catalogs that use Z39.50 protocol like Library of Congress, British Library, NEBIS catalog, Amazon and other 1000 catalogs. LT can be used by individuals, non-profit and not-for-profit organizations. The only drawback of LT is the free limit of books to be catalogued. LT allow only 200 books to be catalogued free of charge (Richards and Sen, 2013). To increase the book limit to 5000 books one requires to pay $10 annual membership fee or $25 for lifetime membership for non-limited number of books to be catalogued (Hvass, 2008; VanTine and Walser, 2008). Nevertheless, it should be pointed out here that these payments are affordable even to small libraries. Commercial software are very expensive both to small libraries as well as big libraries. It explains why many libraries are going for open source software for library management like Koha.

2. Cataloguing with LT

LT allows members to catalogue their own books and be linked with other users through those books. For members to catalog a books members create accounts. Accounts can either be individual or institutional. Once an account is created, the user logs in to catalogue books. Members catalogue books by entering titles, authors, or ISBN numbers to retrieve a bibliographic record (Bartley, n.d). LT then searches the Library of Congress, including five other national Amazon sites, and over 1000 world libraries catalogs, and comes back with exact book data. Users edit the books record in their catalogue, search and sort their entries, tag their books with their personally created subjects, and use the Library of Congress and Dewey Decimal systems to organize their collections (Smith, 2007). According Richards and Sen (2013) many information professionals have seen the value of using LT for cataloguing and the number of libraries implementing the service keeps on increasing. Some examples of libraries that have managed to implement LT that are worth mentioning are like Claremont University Library Consortium implemented a library catalogue with a total of 600,000 volumes materials (Westcott, Chappell & Lebel, 2009). Another small library that embarked on a similar project and had a good testimony is the Scottish Centre for Information on Language Teaching (CILT) and Research. Hvass (2008) had this to say at the end of the implementation of LT at CILT, which is part of University of Strathclyde in United Kingdom: "The catalogue looks great – I am very happy with how it looks and its functionality.

There have been lots of comments, and it is great to be able to direct our users to a web-based resource that is available from anywhere and is simple to use." (2008, p. 7). Therefore, Hvass (2008) concluded that it is possible to build an online catalogue utilizing LibraryThing with little cost, time and also easily. This news is very encouraging because it removes all fears from those who may be skeptical about the possibilities of implementing LT.

Amongst these libraries, some have completely catalogued their collections with LT while others have catalogued some collections. This also gives users flexibility that they can choose to whether to implement LT on the entire collection or some collection. Some examples collections as given by Santolaria (Op cit) include new acquisitions, reading lists, bibliography related to certain events or commemorations, specific subject book lists, the whole collection of a department, project or programme and whole collection of a library. This is a clear demonstration of how LT can be implemented by libraries.

3. Library Catalogs and Collaboration in LT

LT online bibliographic data does not only allow users to create a personal online catalogue with much ease, but it also connects them with people who have similar reading interests. Therefore, apart from using LT for cataloguing, LT offers a facility for its users to connect and form online community basing on similar interest of books to read or share (Calev, 2011). For example, on your LT page for adding books you will find an icon that is labeled TALK. This is a button that lets connect with others online or locally. Clicking the tab will lead you different forums on from topics other users. Here you can join discussion groups or you can even post your own question and other members will be able to respond to you. Calev (Op cit.) observes that:

> To get further involved with LibraryThing, you can also click on the Local tab to check out book signings, book discussions, and other events in your neighborhood. It is a great way to talk to other people about the way they catalog their books and to meet fellow book lovers who enjoy the same reading materials that you do. You can also edit your Profile and allow other users to learn more about you and your collection by clicking the Profile tab at the top of the page (2011, p. 7).

A study conducted by Richards and Sen (2013) found that LT was mostly being used as a promotional tool, to promote library collections and engage library users. Therefore, collaboration is one of the ways LT engages its library users. LT promotes library stock by highlighting specific collections that may be of interest to the library user. On the other hand, through collaborative engagement, other libraries are using LT to suggest books on their websites, recommend books for reading, rate books, review books, tag and view book covers. Amongst the ways libraries can engage its user include, providing strengths and weaknesses of the library collections through review service. Libraries can also engage its user in collection development.

4. LibraryThing for Libraries

LT is catching the interest of many libraries as it has been going under many improvements. Such improvements include the development of LibraryThing for Libraries (LTFL) features. LTFL is an innovative system for improving library catalogs with social data and social features (LibraryThing.com). These features are helping libraries enhance their Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC). With the improved features of LTFL, it is possible for users to start connecting library users to alternative book editions and formats. The Web 2.0 features can also help library users to peruse popular tags given by the system (Spaulding, 2007). The social networking functionality of LT helps build communities of interest with users who share similar book interests.

LibraryThing permits users to allocate descriptive metadata to books in the form of tags. LTFL controls this metadata as part of a number of improvements that can be made as part of a library's OPAC. In an OPAC, the LTFL display will add a tag cloud of the most popular tags to a title's catalog record. LTFL permits libraries augment their catalogue records with tag clouds, recommendations to related books and connects them to other editions and translations of a work, based on the LT database. Libraries can also choose to include recommendations features that can point users to related books in the library's collection (LibraryThing, n.d.). The development of LTFL is one of the improvements that has attracted many libraries to adopt LTFL to enhance their OPACs. These enhancements are in four categories: Catalog enrichment, BookDisplay Widgets, BookPsychic and Library Anywhere. Catalog enrichment is designed to make library catalog more attractive and informative. Built as a social media facility, Catalog enrichment gives ratings and reviews which enables users browse or search a collection of a library to discover the collection. Other functionalities within the Catalog enrichment include viewing similar books, editions, shelf browsing, tag-based discovery, stack map help to identify location where the book may be shelved, series discovery, awards and QR codes used to directly jump into a record using a mobile catalog The second category of LTFL is the Book Display Widgets. This facility shows library's holdings in an eye catching book display widgets. The widgets according to LibrarThing can be placed anywhere on a library's homepage, blog or catalog. (LibraryThing, n.d.). BookPsychic is a personal recommendation service for library users. This the facility that enables users of the library recommend books that only from their library. The Library Everywhere is yet another fascinating facility in LTFL. This is like your moving library that can be accessed on any smart phone (Librarything, n.d.).

It should be pointed out these enhancements some have already been tested by other libraries for example Danbury Public Library in Danbury, Connecticut United States of America was the first library to be on LTFL (Santolaria, Op. cit)

4.1 Motivation for LTFL

LibraryThing is one of the Web 2.0 tools that libraries can make use in the anticipated next generation of library catalogues. Not many libraries have adopted the concept of using Web 2.0 tools on their library catalogs (Kim & Abbas, 2010; Nesta & Mi, 2011). This one of the improvements LT has managed to include on their online catalog. Web 2.0 is based on collaboration. It is high time libraries adopted emerging technologies like the Web 2.0 to enhance collaboration with their patrons. LTFL has managed to incorporate this in its catalog which shows that it is possible. According LibrarThing.com catalog enrichment has enables LT members who have LTFL account to catalog resource and keep track of their collections and share that information with others. LibraryThing permits users to link up socially and reviewing books, exploring similarly tagged books, sharing books, and participating in discussion boards (Fister, 2008). Therefore LT is actually quickest way of moving toward incorporating Web 2.0 tools into our online catalog.

4.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of LT

One of the main advantages of using open source software is that it offers ability to change it to fit your needs, low cost and no restrictions on using it (Boss, 2008). LTFL improves OPAC and explores/implements next generation OPAC ideas. LTFL is a great way to test out a Web 2.0 concept in library that does not necessarily make big changes to the catalog. LTFL enables a library to add tags and book suggestions into your catalogs without having to start from scratch

by building it locally over time. Adopting LTFL is the cheapest way of acquiring a library management software that can be used to create collections and share bibliographic information with other members. At the same time with LTFL, there is a functionality known as Library Anywhere that enables users access their library everywhere in the world by the use of iPhone or Android smart phones. Santolaria (Op cit.) has specifically emphasized that LT is better than other social networks for cataloging because it is an oldest social networking that is well established. Further, LT uses Amazon, Library of Congress and other over 700 library catalogs the world over as source of cataloguing information that use the Z39.50 protocol. On the other hand, LT tagging plays an important role within the site to improve fundability of bibliographic information. Apart from that, Santolaria (Op cit.) points out that the design interface of LT is pleasing and not cluttered. To sum it all, LT has aimed at libraries and librarians as key users of its services and an important market for their product.

Although many libraries including big libraries, for example academic libraries especially in the United States, United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia have adopted LTFL in their library catalogs, the drawback of LT is that is the free limit of 200 books (Santolaria, Op cit). However, not-for-profit or non-profit making organization can apply to LT to have their free limit increased to catalog up to 5,000 books for free. There is annual membership fee of $10 and a lifetime membership fee of $25 membership fee to catalog unlimited number of books.

5. How Big Libraries can also Use LTFL

The numbers for LTFL users continues to grow. Originally, LT was developed to help individuals and small libraries catalog their collection. This trend has changed as we have seen a number of big libraries adopting LT in their libraries. These are libraries that have fully implemented LTFL as part of their library system. Westcott, Chappel and Lebel (2009) conducted a study to share their experiences when LT was being implemented at Claremont University Consortium libraries. Claremont University Library Consortium was the first group of academic libraries to implement LTFL. Findings for this study established that Claremont University Consortium found LTFL very helpful. This assessment was based on how effective the tags they were using and how users were able to produce recommended readings over and above the current bibliographic information given in the traditional library catalog. The study revealed that implementation of LTFL is easy and that LTFL offers important and direct support to users. The remarkable use that LTFL was liked for its capability to find items for research in addition to browsing capabilities. Feedback from students at Claremont showed that the students found LTFL to be very helpful especially for browsing and searching related items. The library staff were equally happy with LTFL although some expressed their reservations on the user generated tags and recommendations. They thought these would not be authoritative since they are not generated by library staff, nevertheless, this study asserted that LTFL is a cheap and an easy way of implementing the next-generation catalog concept in any OPAC. They found LTFL to be easy to use; and an effective way that offers tags browsing, searching, and finding related items; and is simple to implement and manage (Westcott, Chappel & Lebel, 2009, p. 81).

6. Conclusion

This paper concludes that LT is a very important cataloguing, promotional and engagement tool for libraries. This has been proved and established by literature this paper has reviewed that shows LT is a viable social cataloging tool. Having seen some comparison between LT and other social cataloguing tools, it is convincing to conclude that many libraries have fallen and continue to fall in love with LT. What makes LT an exceptional tool is the LTFL in addition to other many improvements which signals innovation on the part of LT to keep up with technological advancements. As pointed out earlier on, librarians need to keep up with new and emerging technological advancements to remain relevant and provide relevant service to its clientele. Social cataloguing tools have already signaled to form the next generation catalog. Our patrons are now on social networking tools. If librarians are to ever remain successful they need to follow their users. Where are they? Get them where they are spending most of their time and what technologies they are using. Therefore librarians need to update their knowledge and skills and be able to provide services using technologies users are using.

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