

## Content and Technology Committee Conference Call--April 12, 2010

Participants: Laura Barnes, GLRPPR; Andy Bray, NEWMOA; Rick Yoder, P2RIC; Madeline Sten, P2Rx

Discussion:

Generally, the group discussed three areas of Social Networking: Delicious and the P2TagTeam project, NING platform, and social networking counseling services.

**General Social Networking.** The group started with a quick review of the last meeting and insights from a subgroup (Erin Bass, Jonathan Stumpf and Laura Barnes) on Web 2.0. Because the subgroup had varying experiences and preferences, they helped move the Web 2.0 discussion forward. The three centers represented on the call (NEWMOA, P2RIC and GLRPPR) and the subgroup members (GLRPPR, PPRC and P2RIC) are active in aspects of social networking, encourage more use of social networking, but may not be representative of the rest of the centers.

### *Recent Activities*

- P2RIC is canvassing the use of social networking tools in Region 7 for the second time, this time with follow-up calls to programs to encourage greater use of machine readable, sharable data such as RSS, Twitter, and Google Calendars. His IT people are doing data mining on Delicious. They are looking at ways to improve the available Delicious search of URLs, descriptive tags, user names and date stamps. They want to use the data mining to aid in discovery of quality information, to build the existing taxonomy of descriptive terms, and to find others interested in P2 and market to them. The mining software is done in Perl. They will be harvesting data from Delicious on a daily basis to populate the database that will support a website interface for mining. They should have a prototype in 3+weeks.
  - On April 29, P2RIC will host an Adobe Connect session on their data mining efforts. Content and Technology Committee members will be invited.
- P2RIC is aggregating Twitter feeds for Region 7 <http://twitter.com/P2RiC/lists/region-7> and uses that as a feed on the P2RIC front page. GLRPPR notes that Twitter use at EPA has escalated and that aggregation would be helpful. She is promoting the use of P2Tags for social bookmarking, mostly Delicious, but also Digg. She is tagging to create bibliographies on the fly for presentations. She puts together Delicious tags for the audience instead of bibliographies.
  - GLRPPR suggested that someone should aggregate EPA twitter feeds for the P2 Coordinators. [Done, but regional feeds are not included: <http://twitter.com/P2RiC/epa>]
- The group suggested that it would be a good idea to brief the full Admin committee on social networking opportunities: definitions, option, experiences of centers deploying social networking technologies (e.g. Twitter or Facebook), and recommendations for those not deploying, what should be deployed and why. The group decided to prepare a pecha-kucha presentation for the Board. P2RIC will put this together for review by the tech committee on May 4.
  - We are focusing on developing the value proposition for social media and first steps for centers not using it.

- What are good metrics for social networking? To some degree use of a NING is an outcome (e.g. there are x number of people on the network and it is self-selecting). This may be a very low threshold. Outcomes are very tough to measure. The “Holy Grail argument” was raised. The Delicious data mining should help build our understanding of metrics for social networking.

**NINGs.** Note that although this discussion focused on NING, the content applies to other similar social networks such as WordPress. This discussion arose in part as the result of a suggestion by Rob Guillemin that creating and supporting regional NINGs might be a good role for P2Rx centers. Sten suggested that the Content and Technology Committee discuss the concept so that P2Rx is prepared to engage in this discussion thoughtfully if it comes up at the P2Coordinators meeting at the Summit in May.

The University of Ohio has put their sustainability website up on NING. Some environmental groups are using NINGs to establish a web presence. (Note: P2RIC has found WordPress to be a good alternative.) There are a lot of NING hospitality networks. The Sustainable Hospitality site has access to an energetic news editor and hotel chains have YouTube videos. Their hope is that the group function will support state-specific networks of hotels and inns, will highlight hotel or inn activities of particular note, and create discussion features to allow the community to share experiences.

- The skeleton for the site includes a calendar, news, blog posts, video selections and work groups.
- These sites do take time to manage. They need leadership, energy and a blueprint for success; otherwise, they are likely to languish.
- An editor is required to prevent posts like recycling videos. Criteria for posts are needed. It might need a librarian. (For example, Marriott Hotels has about 120 videos, mainly about recycling.)
- From a maintenance standpoint, it is possible to populate the site with existing information and to act as an aggregator.
- Some of the sustainability networks have RSS feeds with the latest news. It would be easy to populate a latest newsbox with RSS feeds. From a maintenance standpoint, you can populate the newsbox with existing information and use P2Rx as an aggregator. There are about 15-18 newsfeeds. Updates happen automatically.

*Benefits* of NING and similar social networks include:

- Relatively low barrier to entry in terms of the amount of time and sophistication required of the person creating the NING.
- It is a quick, low cost way to establish a web presence.
- NINGs afford flexibility and the ability to bundle a considerable amount of information.
- Communities may be geographic (city or neighborhood), sector-based (e.g. sustainable hospitality), or based on larger interests (energy conservation).

*Obstacles to success.* Often NINGs have the allure of pilots without a plan for future maintenance and growth. Less successful sites fail to find a regional basis, lack the seed money and time to build content

and get the site off the ground. Attracting users like TripAdvisor may cause additional work. They can be time sinks.

- Some state agencies have prohibitions on the use of RSS or Twitter feeds. For example, Connecticut prohibits the feeds, but has a process that allows case-by-case petitions—a time consuming avenue. P2 people may not have access or priority to get IT people to post their information. Domains may be blocked agency-wide.
- A successful NING needs someone with the energy and time to promote its use.
- When rolling out a NING, it is important to have a blueprint for engaging contributors, developing the community and measuring effectiveness. Lack of planning can cause early visitors to access a site with little to offer. A blueprint should lay out what the organizers are trying to accomplish, who is involved and ways to build content and pull in news. Once this plan is in place, the idea should be pitched to attract the target community.

P2Rx's challenge is to leverage technology and information resources. Our value is in content and contextualizing that content. For smaller networks, it comes from being closer to one another and meeting people via the network. The NING discussion evolved into a discussion of the next topic.

**Social networking counseling.** The group talked about the upcoming meeting with P2 Coordinators. Rob Guillemain of EPA Region 2 has suggested that P2Rx could use NINGs to work with communities such as the E3 communities. P2Rx could help establish NING sites for communities needing a communication vehicle. Generally, the group agreed that the Coordinators are interested in providing direct assistance to technical assistance providers then to clients.

The three centers on the call currently provide within region counseling and assistance to groups interested in establishing a social networking vehicle like a Google group. They may provide out-of-region counseling, but not assistance which is too resource intensive. When these groups are set up, the centers determine what the objective is and try to match need with the appropriate level of service or “right sizing” techniques. Often, all the group really needs is a Google group. Sometimes a website is effective as a “brochure site” or a workgroup site . Successful efforts need nurturing and a leader. One GLRPPR group has around 200 participants.

**Final comments.** This committee believes that an important role for P2Rx is to leverage the expertise of the Centers. They suggest an Admin committee briefing.

- How is social networking tied to the OPPT P2 Strategy?
  - The Content and Technology committee needs to consider this topic.

Assignments:

- GLRPPR will do a blog on use of social networking tools to promote P2.
- P2RIC will host a session on using Delicious data April 29.

- ❑ Our next session will be on May 4. P2RIC will provide a pecha-kucha presentation on Web2.0 as an introductory piece to a larger presentation on the Web 2.0 value proposition to the Admin group.
- ❑ The Executive Committee will figure out how/whether a Web2.0 discussion is appropriate for the May meeting.
- ❑ Madeline Sten will invite Scott Butner to join both sessions. (*Scott is confirmed for May 4.*)