

23 Things for Archivists Pilot Project Report

In 2010, the Reference, Access, and Outreach Section (RAO) of the Society of American Archivists (SAA) offered the 23 Things for Archivists pilot project. “23 Things” programs are Web 2.0/social media learning tools developed by Helene Blowers at the Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenberg County and adopted or adapted by many libraries and similar institutions. The program for RAO members ran from January

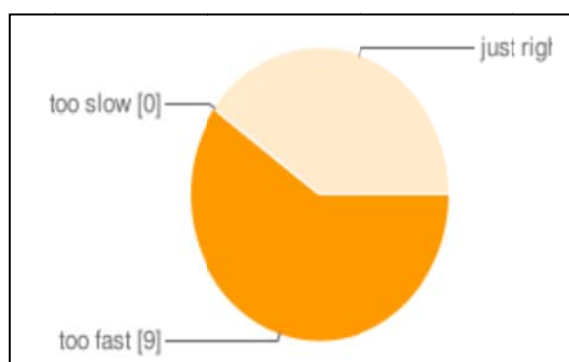
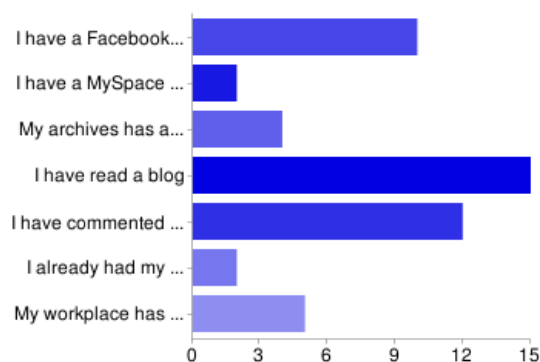
In 2008, Kathryn Otto participated in 23 Things on a Stick, a Web 2.0 learning program sponsored by Minnesota’s seven multicounty multitype library systems. 23 Things on a Stick was Minnesota’s twist on the library learning 2.0 program developed by Blowers. At the time, no one had offered a similar program specifically for archivists. At RAO’s 2008 annual meeting during the SAA Annual Meeting Otto gave a presentation on what a self-paced 23 Things for archivists program might look like and suggested that RAO host such a learning tool for its members. Due to a number of technical and staffing issues, little progress was made on instituting the program in 2008-2009.

After the 2009 annual meeting volunteers were sought to develop and offer a 23 Things for Archivists pilot project. Ben Bromley (RAO Intern), Kathy Marquis (RAO Steering Committee member), Jessica Miller (RAO Intern), Kathie Otto (past RAO Steering Committee member), Amy Schindler (RAO Chair), and Kate Theimer (RAO member) participated in the project as organizers and mentors. During the fall of 2009, this group (minus Schindler) discussed how the project would be conducted, what “Things” to offer, etc. A project plan was developed by Theimer and shared with the RAO Steering Committee at the end of November. [Will attach?] After discussion and some revision of the project plan, the call for participants for the initial offering was sent to the RAO listserv December 15, 2009, with reminders in January. The decision was made to not publicize the initial offering beyond the RAO section if a sufficient number of people signed-up and with 23 individuals signed up it was not necessary to seek participants beyond section membership. first Thing was posted to the 23 Things for Archivists blog (<http://23thingsforarchivists.wordpress.com/>) set-up on WordPress on January 25, 2010. The weekly postings continued on Mondays for 11 weeks.

The 23 Things for Archivists program involved the work of five mentors who worked directly with participants who were working their way through the program. Mentors communicated with their assigned participants via e-mail, blog comments, or social media tools that were assigned as part of the program. Their primary role in the 23 Things program was to answer participants’ questions about the various tools they were assigned, respond to participants’ blog posts, and reach out to participants who seemed to be having difficulty. Mentors were each assigned four or five participants with whom they worked for the duration of the program.

Summary of 23 Things for Archivists Participant Survey Results

Based on a 60% return rate for our 23 (yes, 23!) participants, the following is what we learned about their experiences. All had some familiarity with the most basic Web 2.0 applications: Facebook, LinkedIn and blogs. Most had also used several other common apps.



When queried about the pace of the program, most were happy to have the “Things” revealed week by week, though they also felt that many of the applications required more investigation than

they could reasonably manage in the space of a week. Most seemed to be doing the program on their own time at home. As a result, many fell behind, usually due to workload increases. A frequent suggestion was to have fewer things per week (we had up to three at once) or else more time in between. Several also commented that they disliked needing to open new accounts for each Thing.

Most appreciated the availability of their mentors, getting much needed pointers when they asked. But a significant number didn't actually make use of their mentors at all. There were several comments about participants not interacting with each other, something the organizers noticed as well. A future run of this program might require participants to comment on each others' blogs to encourage this. They did read each others comments and questions, however, and appreciated the assistance they provided.

Many also hoped to finish the program on their own, over time. When asked about the greatest benefit, the most common response was just the opportunity to work through all the applications, understand better how they worked, and be able to judge their usefulness for their archives. "I felt behind the eight ball, but now I feel I am ahead of the curve. There were so many 'wow' factors each week." They appreciated being guided through the Things, having specific assignments, and feeling some pressure to do the work. They also felt more empowered to do further exploration on their own, in the future. They were surprised by how quickly they were able to implement their new tools, and by the ways people are using some of the Web 2.0 applications.

One person started a Facebook page for their archive and got 600 fans fairly quickly. Several people mentioned good support from supervisors (very receptive to supervisors pushing for even more such content), while others were more skeptical about how much support they would get. Will they continue to explore Web 2.0? "No, this is enough" to "YES! I think that because of the course I have shed much of my initial skepticism," (most of the people were closer to the latter opinion.) Most of the participants thought that they would use at least some of the Things in their career. One person aptly stated that social media is time-consuming and administrators would need to carefully consider their use. Finally 13 out of 15 participants who answered the questionnaire said they would either like to be part of a follow-up program (8) or would like to take the same program again (5), while only 2 said they were uninterested in being part of the next program.

Recommendations

Recommend, recommend, recommend.

Submitted 8//2010.