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Online information trends

At the recent Information Online conference held in Sydney, keynote speaker Dr Diana Oblinger talked about today's internet savvy students. One of her observations of the widely dubbed google generation is their "lack of fear ≠ knowledge".

Dr Oblinger referred to recent studies that show that only 2% of college students use their library web site as a starting point for research, whereas 72% of college students use search engines as their first source for finding information. (1)

The trade show offerings of the publishers and vendors were outstanding products for researchers. However, very few of the systems or online services had the extra buzz needed to attract the attention of the generation that link to information, and skim the surface looking for information.

Enticing the internet savvy generation to go beyond google will be an ongoing challenge for information professionals, academics and publishers. Appealing library spaces, both physical and online, are needed; academics should constantly encourage students to go beyond google; and publishers and vendors need to build online services that are intuitive and in line with the other online applications that the google generation love. Public libraries have already developed some exciting library sites that bring together many of the new web applications that the net savvy generation have readily adopted, such as blogs, RSS feeds for alerting users about new content, content tagging and user generated lists of most popular items.

With blogs and RSS feed technology now being extensively used, particularly by media organisations, it was surprising to see that RSS feeds weren't being offered by all of the publishers and vendors as a means to deliver information alerts to their users. For so many online users, not just the google generation, mobile technology has changed the way that users want to receive and read small chunks of information, at times that are convenient to them, and often away from their workplace. The alerts, summaries and discussion of scholarly and business publications produced by the publishers are an ideal source to deliver via RSS to the users PDA or wireless mobile. This won't ease the burden of the time required to stay up to date, but it gives the user more options on when and where to catch up on their reading.

Information Online will be on again in Sydney in 2009, with hopefully more developments for delivering quality information to savvy users.

Upcoming speaking engagement

In March, Heather will be presenting to the Australian Law Librarians' Association on her experience being a mentor and a mentee in an international mentorship program.

¹ http://www.information-online.com.au/docs/Presentations/info_online_2007_v6-ho.pdf