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# Moving at the Speed of Byte: Emerging Technologies for Information Management

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## Recommended Citation

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## Emerging Technologies for Information Management

*by Ellen McGrath, University at Buffalo Law Library*

This was the intriguing title of a webcast I viewed at the University at Buffalo Health Sciences Library on November 8, 2006. It was sponsored by the Medical Library Association, but was not specific only to medical libraries by any means.

There were a number of speakers, some live and some in pre-recorded segments:

- Gabriel R. Rios (University of Alabama—Birmingham, Lister Hill Library of the Health Sciences)
- Michelle Kraft (librarian, South Pointe Hospital, Cleveland)
- Bart Ragon (Claude Moore Health Sciences Library, University of Virginia)
- Chad F. Boeninger (Alden Library, Ohio University)
- David Topps (Northern Ontario School of Medicine, Sudbury)
- Charles J. Greenberg (Harvey Cushing/John Hay Whitney Medical Library, Yale University)
- Ryan P. Looney (Claude Moore Health Sciences Library, University of Virginia)
- Nadine Ellero (Claude Moore Health Sciences Library, University of Virginia)
- Robert Johnson (Virginia Commonwealth University, Tompkins-McCaw Library for the Health Sciences)

The webcast began with a historical overview of Web 1.0, which was referred to as "your mother's web." This segued into a description of Web 2.0, which is a culmination of a number of web trends and has these characteristics:

- Users are content providers who write and contribute ("architecture of participation")
- Dynamic application, unlike static webpages of 1.0
- Extensive use of browsers, RSS readers, etc.
- Continuous updating of content
- Focus on user experience

All of this contributes to Library 2.0, which was defined as a learning community, meeting users where they are. The general introduction was followed by presentations on the specific 2.0 applications: blogs, RSS feeds, podcasts, and wikis. Each application was defined and described and examples of applications were given. Blogging software does the basic technical work for us, so that we can instead focus our efforts on the content. Blogs are interactive and can serve as external or internal communication tools. "The Krafty Librarian," run by speaker Michelle Kraft, was cited as a valuable blog that does the work for us by filtering out the not-so-good and delivering the best.

Podcasts developed out of blogs, and RSS feeds allow users to subscribe to both blogs and podcasts. The Claude Moore Health Sciences Library holds a Multimedia Bootcamp where they teach their users about video editing, image scanning and manipulation, and collaborative tools. It includes podcasting and their users develop a short audio or video podcast during the training. There was a segment on the cataloging of podcasts. It is really just a change in medium, so podcasts can be cataloged like audio or video in any format. Bibliographic records for podcasts have just begun to appear in OCLC during the past few months.

Next up was the topic of wikis. A blog is a communication tool, created by one (or more) person(s) and then delivered to many. It is especially appropriate for announcements and current awareness. A wiki, on the other hand, is a knowledge base: an egalitarian resource to which a large number of people may contribute. It was noted that the strength of the wiki often depends upon the strength of the community participating in it. The final two tips were excellent: have reasonable expectations ("Your users may not think wikis are as cool as you do") and be patient ("People appreciate innovation, but need time to adapt to new technologies").

The final presentation focused on technology forecasting and was delivered by David Topps. He cited some other tech gurus, such as Ray Kurzweil, Neil Howe, Bill Strauss, and John Seely Brown. But he also emphasized non-technical aspects, particularly critical

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thinking, which he feels needs to be fostered.  Topps said the half-life of medical knowledge is 4.5 years and dropping.  His slide on this topic said, "Teach me how to think, teach me how to search, teach me how to appraise."  He predicted that the ability to rapidly recharge portable devices (cell phones, PDAs, etc.) will have an impact in terms of their increased use, especially in the medical field.

Each speaker was asked for a one-sentence summary and some of these observations were:

- Do not use technology just for the sake of using it
- Use the right tool for the right application
- No one tool fits all needs
- Technology must engage the user and enhance the user's experience
- Start small; pick one application and do it well

I received the hefty participant's manual, which includes speaker profiles and contact information, all the slides used during the presentations, and an extensive bibliography.  The rate of technological change is incredible and overwhelming, which we all know.  I was fortunate to be able to attend this event, which helped me to try to put things somewhat in perspective.