Taking the Library Outside the Library: A Light-weight Innovation Model for Heavy-weight Economic Times

Dean B. Krafft, Dianne Dietrich, and Baseema B. Krkoska
April 12, 2010
Mission: To find, configure, distribute, and assess electronic tools and services that take the library to its users, wherever they may be.

The LOL model is perfect as a lightweight innovation model for tough economic times.
Overview

- How LOL works
- Keeping It light
- Letting Go
- Making It Move
- Exposing Ourselves
- Shameless Promotion
- Hot New Ideas
How LOL works
LOL incubates ideas

Sometimes they work out

Sometimes they don’t
If they go into production, LOL sets them free (and they have to move in with someone else)

The LOL team only does pilot projects – it doesn’t support production processes or systems
Rules

• Embrace trends - even if they are fleeting
• Build things for today - not for the ages
• All the services are supplementary - a layer on top of fundamental services
These are the kind of trendy things that LOL might try to build on
Strategies for Low Effort

- Form partnerships
- Use outside tools
- Lightweight investment only
- Support a continuum of effort: from trivial to moderately easy
LOL Logistics

- Started as part of Web site redesign in 2007
- Consists of 8-10 members drawn from Library IT, Rare & Manuscript Collections, Metadata Services, and Public Services
- Time commitment is expected to be 5% or less from team members
- 2-year terms: new members, new ideas
Keeping it Light
Getting outside cheap

Simple tools that we configured and localized – or scripted up quickly
LibX Toolbar

- Originally developed at Virginia Tech
- Facilitates searching library catalogs
- Integrated in Firefox
- Works with a number of OPACs

The group is charged with finding things outside that we can leverage quickly
Passkey

• “Bookmarklet”
• Line of javascript to route library patrons through CUL proxy for licensed resources for off-campus
• Minimal effort, maximal positive feedback

“I love this! whoever created this is a genius!”

“If there was a librarian superhero action figure, it would look like you.”

“Best. Thing. Ever.”

“this is the definition of awesome for those accessing journals online off campus”
Text a Librarian

Started by Library’s Digital Reference Committee – promoted by LOL. Uses a commercial product called Mosio – does require students to enter a keyword (culib) in their message.
Letting Go
Resources in Wikipedia

• Created page on “Core Historical Literature in Agriculture”

• Result: Took significant effort to get it accepted into Wikipedia and the page generated insignificant traffic to CUL resources

• Linked to KMODDL and HEARTH resources from existing Wikipedia articles

• Result: Generated significantly more traffic, but cost/benefit not clear

• Conclusion: Report results to CUL and move on
Physical book had issues: color match wasn’t great; hard to select images; no clear market or distribution channel
Re-mixing it up

• Blurb physical book failed

• We’re trying variants: e-Cards

• Using Blurb as example of how to build on Flickr images - “How-to video”

• Creating a how-to beyond Blurb: mugs, t-shirts, calendars

All very light weight investments
There is no blame in trying something that doesn’t work.

It’s worth hatching new ideas, even if you get some donkeys.
Making it Move
Why we mobilized

• LOL continuously looking for ways to bring library to our users.
• Saw students actively using their handheld devices in the library.
• Talked with student representatives on the Student Library Advisory Board.
• Many library staff members had handheld devices.
• Horizon report (and many others).
CUL’s multi-prong strategy

- Text a Librarian in 2009
- Mobile Instant Messaging
- iPhone app
- Mobile-friendly web site
Mobile IM

Users of mobile devices can now chat with a librarian from their phones

- Visit http://ask.library.cornell.edu on your mobile devices and click on the icon to launch the widget
- iPhone users will be able to download a direct link to the IM client onto their home screen, represented by an icon (similar to an 'App' icon)
- All compatible mobile device users will be able to add a bookmark to the IM client in the mobile browser

Contact: Digital Reference Committee
Both a high-end solution and one that anyone can use

iPhone app at the high end

Basic mobile web site at the low
CU Library iPhone App

Computer Science Software Engineering Course student project - for credit

- Library LOL team was the client
- Negotiated features with team
- Provided a lot of latitude for their ideas
- Formal user testing to provide feedback to team
- Central IT provided support and app store provisioning
Available in iTunes app store; we now have 11 ratings, and we still have 4 and a half stars
Examples of the home screen, search, and my own account showing items checked out – credentials are cached
Lots of ways to find a library that’s open and talk to them
What about the people who don’t have iPhones?
Siruna is a hosted solution that lets you select elements from an existing web site and remap them to create a mobile-friendly site.
Examples of home page, Ask a Librarian, and catalog search transformed with Siruna
“It’s not just good - it’s good enough!”

Krusty the Clown

It doesn’t have to be perfect to be useful to our patrons!
Exposing Ourselves
Much of CUL's digital content is in "silos" or systems. Our image collections are in Luna, which is not discoverable from the outside, does not allow patrons to interact with the collection in ways they're used to in social media sites, or to get the images beyond Luna. Luna does have a wealth of contextual information, including structured metadata, names, dates, places, and descriptions.
Exploring Flickr

• Flickr Commons had just been launched

• We had many images that were out of copyright and in the public domain

• Explored Flickr as another pathway to discovering CUL’s collections

Flickr Commons was launched in 2008, and the Library of Congress uploaded public domain images to facilitate community engagement and make their collection more broadly available. We considered our own image collection; there was much in the public domain that would be of interest to communities beyond the library walls. In May '09, there was a revision to CUL's existing copyright policy, which stated that CUL would not charge for the use of Public domain images. This meant LOL was free to include high resolution images on Flickr with a Creative Commons Attribution License.
Our Flickr strategy

• Upload one collection (entirely public domain)

• Leverage library metadata to make the images more “discoverable” in Flickr

• Point patrons to our account (via library website, “We Recommend”)

We started small, with low effort. We picked one collection that was in the public domain -- the AD White Architectural Photos -- that was historically used for teaching, and had a great deal of metadata already in Luna. We used the existing metadata to maximize these images' visibility on Flickr. We converted subjects to tags, geocoded place names, and added in dates. Everything was uploaded with custom scripts using the Flickr API. We publicized the account, working with Library Communications -- on the front page of the web site, in press releases.
Before, the images were in a library-centered silo. If you didn't know it existed, it was hard to find. You had to already know how to navigate library resources. After — our images were up on Flickr and available to a much wider audience, much easier to discover by chance. This was not a replacement for our image collection! LOL wanted another pathway for discovery of these images; everything links back to CUL's hosted version of the image.
The response

Hi, Dianne!

Recent activity: comments, tags, notes, faves → See All

In a word: overwhelming. As of April 9th, we were close to 200K hits. Our first collection -- architectural photos -- are the most popular, but the others are catching up. We have five collections in total: AD White Architectural, Diver Railroad Photographs, Human Ecology Photographs (public domain subset), Willard Dickereman Straight Photos (from Korea), Political Americana (public domain subset). The majority of our referrals come from Flickr, Google, Yahoo Images and Google Images.

All time totals: 198,842
we’ve found our images crop up...

in other’s curated galleries

Note that one of our subjects (converted to tags) was "umbrella" -- and so someone found this as an example of "historic" umbrellas.
we’ve found our images crop up on the BBC website

Radio 4 Blog

Miriam Margolyes on Bluestockings

Post categories: book, history, reading

Steve Bowbrick | 10:02 PM, Monday, 10 August 2009

While Miriam Margolyes was recording the current Book of the Week, Bluestockings, it became clear that the text had particular meaning for her because she had been a Bluestocking herself. Producer Justine Willett writes:

Cambridge University is celebrating its 800th anniversary this year. And on this week’s Book of the Week, you can hear award-winning actress Miriam Margolyes reading Jane Robinson’s Bluestockings, the remarkable story of how the first British woman went on to get a university education. Miriam, herself a former Newnham College gal, in the early 60s, found reading the book took her back took her back to those extraordinary days at Cambridge, where she shone in the Footlights, made life-long friends, and embraced eccentricity by smoking a pipe...

After the recording, Miriam recorded a few words about Bluestockings:

* The picture shows Newnham College for Women in 1871. It's from Cornell University Library's photostream and it's used under licence.

This brought a great deal of traffic back to our Flickr site (in the referral logs)
we’ve found our images crop up on blogs

I just saw the latest Harry Potter movie and couldn’t help but be impressed by the interior shots of Hogwarts—especially its elaborate ceilings. Above is an old photo of the Divinity School at Oxford University, apparently it was used in the movies as Hogwarts’ Hospital. Next post I’ll put together some artwork based on this ceiling.

I took the ceiling from yesterday, reduced the colors and flipped it all around to make this pattern. The V-shaped lines are the arches and the fans are scattered on top. It’s abstract but I like it as a texture.

People use our images to illustrate a wide variety of things. The Human Ecology photos are especially popular with "do it yourself" blogs -- cooking, sewing, etc. The posted image is of a textile artists' interpretation of one of our architecture photos.
Communities have value to our images. The railroad community is very active, and have already added a wealth of information supplementing our descriptive metadata. The posted image is an aerial shot of Washington DC where a commenter points out a since-destroyed office building and notes the construction of a museum.
User contributions

Borensult Lock on the Göta Canal, Sweden

Collection: A. D. White Architectural Photographs, Cornell University Library
Accession Number: 16560060.00731

Title: Borensult Lock on the Göta Canal, Sweden
Photographer: Axel Stiberg

Canal date: 1922-1925
Photograph date: ca. 1929-ca. 1935

Location: Europe; Sweden
Materials: albumen print
Image: 6 1/4 x 8 1/2 in.; 16.375 x 20.96 cm
Provenance: Transfer from the College of Architecture, Art and Planning
Persistent URL: http://library2.library.cornell.edu/collections/asw7915-528.html

Tagged:
- Cornell University Library
- Göta Canal, Sweden
- Canals
- Bodies of water
- Locks (Hydraulic structures)
- Steamboats
- Leisure
- Transportation
- Smokestacks
- Landscapes
- Canal boats
- Göta Canal

Tags
- Borensult
- Motala
- Östergötland
- Göta Kanal

Users have added tags in other languages -- such as Swedish and German.
Creative remixes!
Mainstream the process

- Visual Resources Working Group
- Rare and Manuscript Collections
- Metadata Services
- Library outside the Library

It's the LOL way to set things free. We found a number of library groups to sustain the Flickr project. We picked portions of the Flickr workflow that fit in with existing missions/responsibilities of groups. VRSG/RMC – identify and vet collections; Metadata Services – converts library metadata to Flickr metadata; LOL – does promotion.
Getting the word out

- Presentations to Library staff
- CULLabs web site
- Posters, bookmarks, table tents, digital display screens
- Cornell Cybertower video on Flickr
- YouTube “handmade” stop-action video for mobile tools
Here’s an example poster and digital screen display advertising our mobile capabilities.
Hot New Ideas
Upcoming

• QR Codes: Library exhibits can link directly to resources or background materials
• YouTube videos: Delving into the special collections treasure trove
• More iPhone features: Authenticated journal and database access
• Any suggestions from the audience?

We're investigating QR codes to link exhibit materials to materials in the library. This is hoped to increase the awareness of library collections beyond the library space. eCards to further spotlight our image collections. We're investigating putting up historic Cornell videos on YouTube. We're also looking to expand on the iPhone App, by adding access to CUL licensed resources for instance.
Summarizing
Rules

• Embrace trends - even if they are fleeting
• Build things for today - not for the ages
• All the services are supplementary - a layer on top of fundamental services
• Invest lightly, iterate, and let go quickly
• There is no blame for trying something that doesn’t work

Embrace trends: Flickr, YouTube, iPhone. This is where our patrons are right now, if we want to reach them. Build things for today: It's quicker, it gives us room to experiment. All services are supplementary: We want to enhance what's already there, bring patrons to our core services, even if they're far away from the physical library. Invest lightly: Trends are fleeting and fast-paced. We need to be able to keep up, otherwise we won't reach our patrons. No blame: It's essential to foster a culture of experimentation. Without it, we would be too afraid to try. We learn from what doesn't pan out.
What we covered

- How LOL works
- Keeping It light
- Letting Go
- Making It Move
- Exposing Ourselves
- Shameless Promotion
- Hot New Ideas
Questions?
Acknowledgements

• The LOL team: Eleanor Brown, Matt Connolly, Tony Cosgrave, Jeremy Cusker, Laura Larrimore, Rick Silterra, and Susette Newberry (former member and chair)

• LOL Team Sponsors: Janet McCue, Oya Rieger

• iPhone app development team: Kenneth John Bongort Jr., Elizabeth Miriam Brown, Christopher Walther Frommann, Christopher Michael Hulton, Wesley Brent Jordan, and Bindu Pan

• All the Cornell University Library Staff who help make LOL possible