

Rethinking Records Management for the Web 2.0 World

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The latest technological wrinkle is going by the concise rubric “2.0.” Sometimes more formally referred to as “Web 2.0,” it is a reference to the increasing number of services being offered online without the downloading, storage, and cost of the “traditional” client/server environment. This means that, in varying degrees, an organization’s information is not being kept on its own servers, but on the web – or, as some describe it, “in the clouds.” This has great potential for organizations to cede some degree of control over their information to the web provider and its users.

The recent significant uptick in offerings from these providers is a difference in scale aspiring to be a difference in kind. Many vendors, including Amazon and Google, have been committed to web services for some time. The change now is that more vendors are offering a greater range and quality of these services.

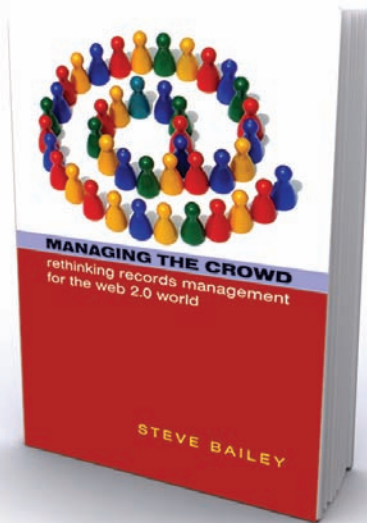
For example, in Google Apps, the familiar search engine is offering the full range of Windows-like Office suite products. 2.0 offerings include web e-mail, blogs, wikis, RSS feeds, collaboration tools, document sharing, and social network and categorizing sites. Some informal adoption of these capabilities by would-be “techies,” as opposed to the IT department, is happening in some organizations. Records management (RM) professionals need to address the implications of this now to minimize the “catch up” position they have found themselves in during IT rollouts of yore.

Web 2.0 and RM Challenges

In a book that will be of interest to all records managers seeking to get a handle on this technology, Steve Bailey of the British Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) confronts the questions presented by RM 2.0 and proposes principles setting out how, at this point, it might be defined.

He sees its advent providing challenges to the ability of RM – as we know it – to handle the volume and variety of information with which it should be concerned in a web environment, and asks whether RM is, in that environment, “fit for purpose.” Bailey would have us rethink traditional RM practices, especially in the areas of records appraisal and retention. This rethinking is required because so much information is being generated in so many venues that it is outstripping the ability of the records manager to keep up.

How to do this? Many 2.0 sites allow users to attach tags (descriptive keywords or terms) to the information used on the site. Some sites, prominently Del.icio.us and Flickr, allow users to store their tags and view related ones. One of the qualities of 2.0



Managing the Crowd: Rethinking Records Management for the Web 2.0 World

Author: **Steve Bailey**

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site users is their desire to provide this sort of information (as opposed to the much-resisted but functionally equivalent metadata fields). Users could also be prompted to voluntarily provide their view of how long the information should be kept available.

Of course, perceived value and actual value are often two different things. So, a records manager could rely on the evaluation of the 2.0 “crowd” for at least an end user idea about the usefulness and staying power of the information and complement that with his or her own judgment of the information’s value based on the organization’s informa-

tion management needs and policies.

In addition, the records manager should produce a statement regarding the use of Web 2.0 tools and integrate it into the policy about how all types of digital communication are to be handled. The portion regarding the use of Web 2.0 tools might require their hosting within the firewall, prohibiting anonymous postings, or allowing access only on a need-to-know basis for certain stated purposes.

Bailey does not see 2.0 as being appropriate for all environments. The creative and collaborative fields, such as advertising and software design, could make the most use of it. Greater compliance requirements would lessen its application in regulated industries and government. Further, he does not advocate supplanting traditional RM where it does work.

Happily, Bailey has both a clear and engaging style and an obvious zest for the subject. Further, he has gone where few have dared to tread. He does, however, suffer from some of the expected problems of one who does this. For example, he does not address concerns about privacy, security, ownership of information, an inherent ambiguity of tags for one object originating from multiple sources, relation to 1.0 records, and crafting an effective service-level agreement with 2.0 vendors.

These shortcomings are outweighed by the book's most valuable contribution of describing a possible role for records managers in the 2.0 world. As 2.0 increasingly makes its presence known, many should be turning – and returning – to this admittedly pricey book for guidance and as a point of departure in grappling with its challenges. **ENR**

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