

InfoTech Column
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John: Have Janice check this one out before publishing it. I think I've got some of the details right from our chats. Thanks, SA

The New Normal: Association 1.5

By Stephen Abram

I am writing this column having just attended the SLA Leadership Summit in Reno, Nevada. As always, one leaves impressed with our leadership and all the innovations being tried by members in chapters, divisions, caucuses, committees, conference planning, and by SLA staff. It's pretty exciting but it always begs the question: "What's Next?"

The Old Normal

The ancient SLA normal was great – just like classical Greek and Roman civilizations were wonderful. SLA networked, talked, attended programs, educated key influencers, and more. Librarians hopped on the appropriate technologies quickly in the service of information and our users. The New Normal at SLA is that virtually every division and chapter has the foundation of a website, a discussion list and an electronic bulletin. Many units have advanced versions of these and some have even more pilots and exciting innovations to serve their members and audiences. When we first set the goals of the virtual association to supplement and enhance the value of membership for all members, who would have guessed it would take almost a decade to become 'normal'? That's the nature of the adoption curve espoused by Geoffrey Moore. If we want to proceed to the next steps in our future evolution, we better start now.

Many units, members and international headquarters are leading the way. We can learn from each other!

The New Normal

I believe that there are just five big things that every SLA unit should be trying this year. Not ten, not one hundred, just five this year. And I don't mean full-fledged blow outs where everything is launched everywhere 24/7. That's just too much. I just mean that these are five of the best candidates for changing and improving the ways our Association works – for the better.

SLA is all about networking, learning and influence. All of these next five technologies can be used in support of these key mandates to serve our

members well. Also, they're the responsibility of members to learn on their own, not for the association to mandate or shove down our throats. However, SLA, the association, CAN provide the framework for success and offer the technologies and ecosystems for our members and units to experiment and incubate the new ideas. It took us a while to build the virtual association framework and offer the basics for all units to succeed. Maybe we can get out ahead of the curve this round.

The new normal would add to the strong foundation of the virtual association. My five top choices of technologies to add are: blogs, wikis, podcasts, webcasts, and social networking. Let's brainstorm a little, shall we?

Blogs

I don't advocate the ending of newsletters, bulletins, mailing lists and electronic discussion lists in favor of blogs like some blogophiles have. Too many folks have investments in the learning here and it's impossible for seamless switches to happen overnight, even if it was desirable. Then again, I doubt many units are still running popular Gopher or Archie sites. I do see the advantages in blogs as a channel for member communication and some should appeal to our association culture in particular. Firstly, blogs allow for storage of our conversations and postings in a way that makes them re-usable and re-discoverable. The comments features, when turned on, allow for threaded discussions on a posting as well as for conversations among members beyond e-lists and meetings. The ability to aggregate these into our workflow through Bloglines and other aggregators seamlessly integrates SLA into our daily lives. And, it gets SLA members viewpoints out into the blogosphere better than the walled gardens of discussion lists and internally oriented bulletins. Of course you can get blogging software for free from many places but SLA offers free blog hosting for any member or unit. Check out Janice Lachance's CEO blog, InfoX, as an example of one at: <http://slablogger.typepad.com/infox/>. There's a whole list of SLA hosted blogs here: <http://www.sla.org/content/community/blogs/index.cfm>. I truly love my blog.

Wikis

Again, one of the insights I repeatedly get at SLA international meetings is the poor way we collect and retain our institutional memories. What are the hot program ideas? What are the good tools for special librarians? Where are our documents for our unit and where can I find HQ's models and guides? Yes, we have a search engine of sorts on the SLA.org site and we do have Communities of Practice software for any SLA member or unit. Each of these serves their purposes but each leaves a lot to be desired. Have you considered a wiki? We've certainly had some experience with collaborative annual conference wikis and some units, like the leadership and Management Division, have them set up (lmd.pbwiki.com). Wikis are basically a way to get your institutional memory

(policies, minutes, programs, ideas, and more) to archive and persist beyond each board or committee membership. Have you considered assigning this to your archivist to populate and train your team? A free podcast and webcast is Meredith Farkas' "Wiki: The Ultimate Tool For Online Collaboration" (http://www.sirsidynixinstitute.com/seminar_page.php?sid=66).

Have you built a tagging system of social bookmarks for your chapter or division? Check out Digg, del.icio.us, Unalog, Connotea, and the rest and see where your imagination takes you. Volunteer to start a social content site for your unit. Try a "12 weeks to a Better Bookmark List" program on your discussion list. Make it a fun learning experience with results to be had by all.

Podcasts

At The Reno Leadership Summit I hit the Sony Factory Outlet and bought a recording microphone for my iPod Video. It was about \$49.95US. Not so much - certainly affordable for most units. Now all you need to do is borrow an iPod from a member or their kid! Now let's open our imaginations. What could it mean to record CD quality MP3 files of anything we produce - interviews, panel discussions, meetings, debates, programs? Post an MP3 to your blog and you have a podcast - Simple as that. Upload it to iTunes and you have our viewpoints out there in the world. Yes there will be issues. Then again, if we don't try we'll only be imagining them rather than making decisions from real experience. Let's see what we can do with this. SLA has quite few podcasts at Click University and I've made a few this year. It's a real learning experience and, again, we're only limited by our imaginations with how we might invent SLA 1.5 with tools like this. Learn about podcasting through Greg Schwartz's free Beginner's Guide to podcasting (http://www.sirsidynixinstitute.com/seminar_page.php?sid=62 and http://www.sirsidynixinstitute.com/seminar_page.php?sid=63). We can really find our 'voice' as advocates with this technology.

Webcasts

These seem to be getting easier by the minute. Learning to how to screencast is easier than it looks. (Check out Paul Pival's SirsiDynix podcast and webcast about screencasting at http://www.sirsidynixinstitute.com/seminar_page.php?sid=71). YouTube has changed the way we will view broadcasting (does anyone still us that word) forever. I've got quite a few streaming media events of my speeches on the web - there courtesy of camera phones, student chapters, library schools and professional events. Cool. It makes what we say persist. It widens our voice and increases the voices out there in the debates as we create the future. It's also a great learning experience. The experience of learning is arguably best in person. However, it just isn't practical or even possible for every member to be at every event. In the past we couldn't change that fact. Now we can.

Social networking

Networking is the numero uno benefit I get from SLA. I know it's in the top three benefits for most of us. I know many members have Facebook and MySpace sites set up for work, and some chapters and divisions are there experimenting already. (Check out SLA Kentucky and our SLA IT Division folks in Facebook). These are truly early days on how these social networking tools will play out and affect our professional lives and institutions. It would be wise to experiment with these in our associations to learn and know more about them. I am not recommending that Facebook is the best one although it shows great potential for SLA Groups since it opened up beyond the education domain. MySpace isn't just teens anymore. Bebo is more popular in the UK, Europe and Australia and New Zealand. Given the number of invites I get, corporate users seem to be having a great time in Plaxo and LinkedIn. Academics are trying Academici and Google's Orkut is dominating in Brazil. It appears that there is lots of potential for learning in these spaces too. We might even meet a few new potential new SLA members in the next generation!

It's a great renaissance out there. We can't be left behind in the e-mail Dark Ages! We can't rest on our laurels now that we have such great infrastructure available at a cost effective rate. We can sustain our knowledge and archives; we can put on intra-member communication on steroids; we can influence the whole web ecology. Let's do it.

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