

September 2006

Are New Technology and New Business Models Leading to a New Literature?

Stephen Rhind-Tutt

Alexander Street Press, rhindtutt@fairfaxhouse.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rhind-Tutt, Stephen (2006) "Are New Technology and New Business Models Leading to a New Literature?," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 18: Iss. 4, Article 11.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4918>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Are New Technology and New Business Models Leading to a New Literature?



by **Stephen Rhind-Tutt** (President, Alexander Street Press, LLC., 3212 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314; Phone: 703-212-8520) <rhindtutt@alexanderst.com>

At the conference of the **Organization of American Historians** in April 2006, **Alexander Street Press** launched a new, free Website entitled **The “Second Wave” and Beyond** (<http://scholar.alexanderstreet.com>). It’s the first of a new series of free, scholarly communities hosted by the company intended to capitalize on the opportunities offered by the new suite of technologies commonly referred to as **Web 2.0**. This article looks at the site, the new technology and business model behind it, and how this site and others like it have the potential to transform scholarly publishing.

Background

When historians compile the history of our industry, I think they’ll decide that late 2004 was a watershed moment. At the **Frankfurt Book Fair** in October of that year, **Google** announced its **Google Print** initiative. The following month, the company announced its companion **Google Scholar** project. These two initiatives made it clear that the community of scholarly publishing and librarianship was no longer going to be quite so cozy. Indeed, we’ve subsequently seen that **Microsoft**, **Yahoo!**, and other behemoths are now also part of the scholarly landscape.

The size of **Google** and **Microsoft** (as measured in capitalization or revenue) is many thousands of times larger than that of the average independent publisher. Even companies like **Thomson** and **Reed-Elsevier** are less than a twentieth of their size in capitalization. And, at least in **Google’s** case, their mission statement — “to organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful” — is very close to that found in most libraries and publishing companies. It’s time, then, for us to scrutinize these new arrivals and ask ourselves what we can do usefully that they cannot and how we can make use of the tools they’re developing.

In late 2004, another watershed event occurred that drew less attention from our community but was no less important. **Dale Dougherty**, vice president at **O’Reilly**, coined the now influential term “**Web 2.0**” to describe the changes in technologies of the most successful and innovative companies and applications. Although many of the techniques and technologies that comprise it were several years old, the significance of considering them together was undeniable.

What’s **Web 2.0**? It’s a collection of software techniques and designs that empower users to interact and co-create their own online experiences. The prevailing strategy of **Web 1.0** was to attract users to your site, to make it “sticky,” and to push content — a design exemplified in a company such as **AOL**. By contrast, **Web 2.0** is about allowing your content to be open, to allow users to contribute directly to

your site — the way **Flickr** or **Wikipedia** behave — and further, to allow the content to be syndicated and edited by others. Where **Web 1.0** was designed to lead users to particular kinds of pre-existing information, **Web 2.0** draws users into the process of collaborating and creating the content themselves. In this sense, **Web 2.0** represents much more of a shift in thinking about who owns and creates content than a change in technology.

Web 2.0 has many other dimensions. It’s about allowing you to personalize your interface rather than adjusting your habits to fit an existing structure. It’s about folksonomies, an indexing technique that lets users attach their own subject headings to tag content rather than making them work only with a predetermined, centrally-controlled vocabulary. It’s about letting content evolve organically according to the interests and specialties of the user.

and ideas of the movement. They wanted a means both to document and share their experiences and to attempt to analyze the happenings of the time in more depth.

This kind of collection was peculiarly suited to the new medium. The story wasn’t that of one person, or of one experience — rather it was many hundreds of stories and many thousands of experiences. It needed to be told in many voices. What better idea than to create a Website based on the principles of openness and collaboration inherent in **Web 2.0**?

Of course, there was the problem of money. How could we pay for the cost of setting up the infrastructure?

We decided to build two collections:

- **Publications on the Status of Women** — provides reports, pamphlets, and other published material from 1961 to the

Web 1.0	Web 2.0
Content Management System (Information silos, centrally managed)	Wikis, (Interactive content, User enabled)
Directories (Central taxonomy)	Folksonomy (Users do their own tagging)
Stickiness (Pull everyone to your site)	Syndication (let your content interact wherever it’s needed)
Personal Websites (Stasis, one-to-one communication)	Blogging (Dynamism, interactivity)
Standard interface for all	Uniquely tailored interface and content
AOL, Netscape, Britannica	Skype, del.icio.us, flickr, Wikipedia

Why is this significant for libraries and publishers? By now I hope it’s clear. **Web 2.0** turns many traditional models of publication on their heads. By leveraging the power of individuals, it allows small, previously unknown, and content-poor organizations to challenge large, well-established outfits. **Skype**, **MySpace**, **Wikipedia**, and **Flickr** have all grown from nothing to become world recognized names in the space of a few years’ time. There must be lessons in this for us.

Traditional Publishing Meets Web 2.0

In 2005, **Alexander Street** was approached by a group of academics who wanted to a way to document, discuss, comment, and engage with each other on the period of post-1960 feminism known as “the second wave.” A number of these scholars lived through this period of time and had collections of photographs, flyers, buttons and other ephemera, as well as of course their invaluable memories of the stories

present. The beauty of this material is that it provides snapshots in place and time that document the condition of women across the United States and the activities of people interested in promoting women’s well-being. For example, you can read in detail how a group in Illinois in the late 1970s is concerned with changing the law to recognize marital rape, or see statistics pertaining to high school education of girls in California in the 1980s.

- **The “Second Wave” and Beyond** — provides a free forum for the community to discuss the history and to share unpublished work, images, book reviews, teaching strategies, and other material on post-1960 feminism. The site is edited by three academics and supervised by **Kathryn Sklar** and **Thomas Dublin**, two well-respected scholars in the area.

Publications on the Status of Women is

continued on page 40

Are New Technology ... from page 38

sold as a traditional library product. Libraries can either subscribe to it or purchase perpetual rights and then provide access to their patrons. Non-subscribers may not access this collection.

The "Second Wave" and Beyond is free. The site is led by three editors, **Judith Ezekiel**, **Stephanie Gilmore**, and **Kimberly Springer**, who are themselves active scholars in the field. By monitoring and encouraging collaboration, the editors instill a spirit of peer review to the site, giving scholars a meaningful online environment in which to flush out their research and writing. Anyone can read and browse the materials posted there, but to participate in the discussions and contribute material, you first need approval from the editors. This form of open access with peer-reviewed participation allows us to keep the site fresh, but at the same time it ensures that the quality of posting remains high.

How's it Working Out?

While it's still in its early days, the initial signs are encouraging. In the past couple of months, we've had some 150 academics, graduate students, and activists sign up and get accepted as participants on the site.

A number of well-known academics have gotten on board. One lively discussion centered on an article published by **Carol Hanisch** in 1970 entitled, "The Personal is Political." This new form of publication offered **Ms. Hanisch** an opportunity both to publish a new introduction to the piece and to candidly discuss the original article and the reaction to it with other scholars.

Several things are apparent from the quotation below:

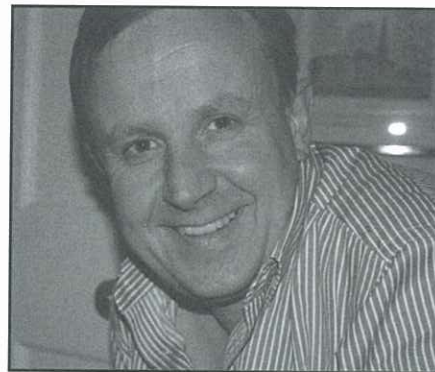
"This is Carol Hanisch responding. I'm delighted to be participating in this pioneering use of the Web for discussing feminist theory. Greeting to all, and especially to Chude Allen, who I knew as Pam in New York Radical Women (hereafter referred to as NYRW) nearly 40 (YIKES!) years ago.

*Actually, NYRW was my first major experience with feminist organizing and thought. I'd read Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* the summer of 1964 while working as a UPI reporter fresh out of college in the Des Moines Bureau (which was also where I encountered major work discrimination). There had been rumblings of feminism in college (Drake University in Des Moines), especially over dorm hours for women while the guys had none. Although I found it interesting, Friedan's book did not strike a major chord with me. As an "Iowa farm girl," I had no contact with suburban American housewifery except on TV and the movies, and I had no desire to become any kind of housewife, though I assumed I would marry and have children. Obviously I hadn't thought that one through, but this was a gut reaction, not an ideological one!"*

You can see immediately that this type of discourse is very different from traditional forums. It's much less formal, more conversational, and above all much more personal. This last has been a pervasive characteristic of the site so far. Already there are a number of articles that talk about historical events in personal terms. For example, **Stephanie Gilmore** talks about her experiences growing up in Alabama in 1985 (<http://scholar.alexanderstreet.com/x/OAc>) and how her high school teacher reacted to her notions of feminism.

It's informal perhaps, but the editorial control means that the site is largely free from the trivial, the factually inaccurate, and the irrelevant. It's more formal and stable than email, and more interlinked and supported than discussion group conversation.

Users can follow each comment or page independently, via RSS subscription. Discussions or pages can be printed or copied using **MS Word** or in **PDF**. Users can view and compare how the page has been edited and by whom. And finally, scholarly users who have been granted access by the editors can comment on or change what's been posted.



Pictured above is **Stephen Rhind-Tutt**.

Academics have also been using the site to post scholarship and images that otherwise would still be languishing in their file cabinets. Here, for example, is a posting by **Judith Ezekiel** of a Gay Pride demonstration that she attended in New York in 1977.

Ms. Ezekiel is also developing a comprehensive chronology of the women's movement on the site. Other users are now referencing and editing the chronology, adding new events to the sequence, linking to primary materials describing these events, and elaborating on the experience and significance of them. Through this process, the scholars are collectively creating an authoritative sequence of events.

The site allows postings of a wide range of varied and often hard-to-find material including syllabi, lists of links, and reviews. Each of these objects now lives in a formal way on the Web, where it can be referenced and accessed easily later.

Going Forward

As the community begins to use the site more, we will learn much and also expect the site to grow in value and utility. Already we're seeing requests for navigational improvements and for training on how better to use the technology.

We're also planning a second site called **Teaching Women** that will be aimed at the teaching community. Further down the line, we plan to introduce additional scholarly communities to complement our other existing collections. We aim to offer interactive communities for disciplines including American history, music, religion, theatre, and film. Researchers will not only benefit from the material we publish, but they will have an opportunity to add to it and read what colleagues worldwide have to contribute.

The technologies that are so well used by **Wikipedia**, **Flickr**, and others hold great promise for scholars. The "Second Wave" and **Beyond** is a small example of how they can be applied. Our experience so far suggests that we're seeing the emergence not just of a new technology, but also of a new model of scholarship and of literature that will be more accessible, easier to understand, conducted in real time, and conducted with participation from many scholars at the same time. 🐘

Is Access to Government ... from page 36

What benefits does the future hold for government information? Ideally, every Internet connection will be a depository library, and every librarian a government information expert. While the distribution mechanism is imperfect, the information is out there, and freely available. To create a brighter future for government information, library organizations must make developing and promoting government

information collections a priority (especially local interest collections), and support permanent, free access to government information whenever possible through local library policies, financial support for access projects, and legislative support for open access initiatives.

Government information is funded by the people, and created for the people, and should be forever accessible. Current and future projects and programs must facilitate access through policy and technology as well as keeping costs within the reach of libraries and citizens. 🐘

Endnotes

1. <http://www.ombwatch.org/article/articleview/213/1/1>.
2. "Let the People Know the Facts," pg. 9, *Law Library Journal*, 2006-01.
3. <http://www.archive.org/index.php>.