

[Jane Secker](#)

The continuing adventures of LASSIE

**Article (Submitted version)
(Pre-refereed)**

Original citation:

Secker, Jane (2008) The continuing adventures of LASSIE. *ALISS Quarterly*, 3 (2). pp. 9-12. ISSN 1747-9258

© 2008 [ALISS](#)

This version available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/4157/>

Available in LSE Research Online: April 2008

LSE has developed LSE Research Online so that users may access research output of the School. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LSE Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute the URL (<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>) of the LSE Research Online website.

This document is the author's submitted version of the journal article, before the peer review process. There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

The continuing adventures of LASSIE. Jane Secker, LSE Centre for Learning Technology

In the October 2007 issue of ALISS Quarterly we reported briefly on the LASSIE (Libraries and Social Software in Education) Project. Led by LSE's Centre for Learning Technology and the Institute of Education, this short project has been exploring how social software might enhance the distance learners' experience of libraries. The project Steering Group includes the University of London Research Library Services, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the Open University and colleagues from the Library and Archives at LSE. LASSIE is due to complete in January 2008 and will publish several reports and case studies on the project website (<http://clt.lse.ac.uk/Projects/LASSIE.php>) which should be of wider interest to the library community about the application of social software. In addition to an extensive literature review, LASSIE undertook five case studies which involved exploring a specific type of social software in more detail, and where possible getting feedback from distance learners about how it impacted on their learning. This short paper will provide an overview of the work to date and some of our findings.

The literature review

At the outset of the project it was agreed the project would undertake a detailed literature review to gain a snapshot of social software initiatives in the library community. Our research found that the phenomena known sometimes as 'web 2.0' has received a lot of publicity in the mainstream media recently. In addition the library world is full of people exploring how social software might be used to enhance their services. However, at the outset of the project the team felt it was important to provide some definitions for the library community of terms such as Library 2.0, which are being used with increased frequency. For this reason we conducted a detailed literature review which examines different types of social software (e.g. blogs, wiki's, RSS feeds and social bookmarking tools) and provides examples of how libraries are using these tools and services. The draft literature review (Secker, 2007) is available on the project website and the updated literature review will be available in January 2008.

LASSIE found that librarians have become keen bloggers and in the US (and to a lesser extent in the UK) libraries are using blogs for news information and to reach out to their users. See for example Madison-Jefferson County Public library (<http://micpl.org/>), and Kansas State University library blogs (<http://ksulib.typepad.com/>). A great example of a UK university using blogs is closer to home at the University of Worcester, where they launched ILS Matters (<http://www2.worc.ac.uk/wordpress/>) to raise the profile of library services to students. Worcester are also using blogs to reach out to their academic staff and for internal communication purposes amongst library staff. We felt blogging was of particular interest and decided to focus one of the case studies on the role of blogging in libraries. This was partly based on our own experiences of running a blog for the duration of the project. The LASSIE project blog (<http://elearning.lse.ac.uk/blogs/socialsoftware/>) has proved to be a great way of documenting the progress of the project, of reflecting on what we've been doing and also on publicising the project. We've developed a solid readership over the past nine months and hope to continue using the blog in the future.

Another very important technology that we have explored in the LASSIE project is RSS or Really Simple Syndication. RSS underpins many web 2.0 technologies and is a dialect of XML. Put simply, it is a machine-readable language, much like HTML, designed to provide a framework in which information can be contained. An RSS document provides a set of items, each of which has a title, a description and a link to an online resource. A series of items, almost always provided in some kind of chronological order, makes up a feed. News information is particularly useful when provided in RSS format, as rather than a reader having to visit a website to see what's new, by subscribing to a feed, one can be continuously kept updated. Libraries in the US in particular, are encouraging their users to subscribe to a variety of RSS feeds to keep up to date with library news, the latest acquisitions to the library catalogue and new electronic resources. For example, MIT Libraries maintain a list of RSS feeds (<http://libraries.mit.edu/help/rss/feeds.html>) available

from their site. Meanwhile, closer to home London School of Economics and Political Science, have developed a Training portal (<http://www.training.lse.ac.uk/>) which uses RSS technology to pull together training events from around the institution. The RSS feed has also been incorporated into the VLE, Moodle and the institutional portal to provide a list of upcoming training events for staff and students.

Another increasingly common application of social software in the library setting has been considered more revolutionary in some quarters. The inclusion of 'user generated content' (such as ratings, book reviews and user comments) into the catalogue has been implemented in several libraries. See for example Hennepin County Library (<http://catalog.hclib.org/>) and the University of Huddersfield (<http://webcat.hud.ac.uk/>) which are now allowing students to rate books. Huddersfield also use features similar to those employed by Amazon, which suggest titles to borrowers, based on the user data. So for example, the catalogue now includes the feature 'users who borrowed this book, also borrowed...'. Arguably, this initiative gives the user a better experience when using the catalogue, making it more similar to the online shopping experience they are invariably more familiar with.

The case studies

Over the past few months the LASSIE team has carried out a number of five case studies to explore how particular tools might enhance the learning experience of real distance learning students. The first case study on blogging has been mentioned above, however as part of the project a citing and referencing screencast was developed by the team. Using the Camtasia software, a training session with audio and screen capture was prepared. A menu system allows students to pick and choose how they access the material. They can view the presentation from start to finish, but are free to jump about using the menu. Feedback has been gathered from students on the role of online training or 'podcasts' in delivering training and in general students would like more online support, but they would still like to be able to attend face to face classes. The resource is available on the Library website at LSE:

http://www.lse.ac.uk/library/inskr/citing_referencing.htm

Another case study has been exploring the social bookmarking tool del.icio.us (<http://del.icio.us/>) to collect useful resources for the project, but also as a way of directing students to web based resources. Several institutions in the US but also in Australia have developed web based subject guides using del.icio.us. The tool is extremely flexible and can be incorporated into your own website very easily. Queensland University of Technology have an excellent example of how this can be used by library subject specialists to direct students to relevant resources. See: <http://www.library.qut.edu.au/subjectpath/internetresourcesforci.jsp> for more details. Members of the project team also used this tool with different groups of students and have collected some initial feedback about its value.

A case study was also undertaken to explore whether traditional reading lists can be improved using social software. The project team explored the use of four online reading list or book list systems including: CiteUlike (<http://www.citeulike.org/>) H2O Playlists (<http://h2obeta.law.harvard.edu/home.do>) LibraryThing (<http://www.librarything.com>) and Bibsonomy (<http://www.bibsonomy.org/>) to present reading list information to students on a University of London distance learning course. A final case study will also look at the role of the social networking site Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/>) as a tool for librarians and for library services. This case study is largely literature based, although draws on experiences of project team members who have joined Facebook.

Conclusion

LASSIE will now continue her adventures until January 2007 when a final report will be made available from the project website. The project has provided the team with a wealth of valuable experience and knowledge about social software. In addition, the real life examples of using social software with students and the feedback that we have gathered, provides timely evidence for the library community of the way forward, as many considering whether or how to use social software. The Project Steering Group will be meeting for a final review of LASSIE in February 2008 and hope

that what they have learnt can continue to be disseminated through presentations and ideally some hands-on training events for librarians.

References

Secker, Jane (2007) Libraries, Social Software and distance learners: draft literature review. July 2007. Available at: http://clt.lse.ac.uk/Projects/LASSIE_lit_review_draft.pdf