

Talis developed Silkworm directory of UK libraries. The directory is more than a simple list of libraries or library catalogues; it manages the complexity of configuring the connection to each individual OPAC and/or council website. The developer doesn't have to be concerned about how to make a Z39.50 connection, or worry about what to do when the URL for the library changes; Silkworm manages all that for him/her.



Like Google maps, the Silkworm directory is available as a web service to external users. For example, the Research Libraries Group (RLG) already partner with Talis and uses the directory to make links from their 'redlightgreen' union catalogue application to the catalogues of UK libraries.

Project Skywalk

"Web 2.0 presages a freeing of data, allowing it to be exposed, discovered and manipulated in a variety of ways..."

"Web 2.0 applications work for the user, and are able to locate and assemble content that meets our needs as users, rather than forcing us to conform to the paths laid out for us by content owners or their intermediaries."

How might some of the underlying technologies be used to re-engineer existing library domain applications? For several years Talis has hosted a vast database of library holdings (UnityWeb) and we are investigating how this resource could be used with other services and potential partners. For example, how might we embed this resource in other applications and mix it with other web services?

The example *opposite* shows a record from a library catalogue (the National Library of Scotland (NLS)) with 'added' extra services, that are not a feature of the native OPAC. These are embedded into the web site using some smart Web 2.0 techniques. The example shows a link to a bookjacket image (from Amazon) and also a link to a Talis service ('Project Skywalk') that lists the libraries that have the book. The latter is an especially useful feature as the NLS does not loan out material. This combination of services is made possible by using a special feature ('Greasemonkey') of the 'Firefox' web browser (there are ways to do it with other browsers too). This enables some clever Talis scripting to link to the appropriate web services that deliver the image and also the library holding for the title.

There are other potential places we could embed this library resource of holdings. For example, users of Amazon might like to see if a book they have found for sale on the website is available for loan from a library.

Challenging existing models of library operation

This opportunity presents a challenge for the library community.

If I live in Essex and discover a book is on the shelf in a library in Scotland there is no simple and effective library fulfilment mechanism. Present Inter-Library-Loan (ILL) mechanisms are creaky to say the least.⁷ Certainly, the clumsiness of ILL contrasts badly with the ease with which I can get the book either new or secondhand from Amazon.

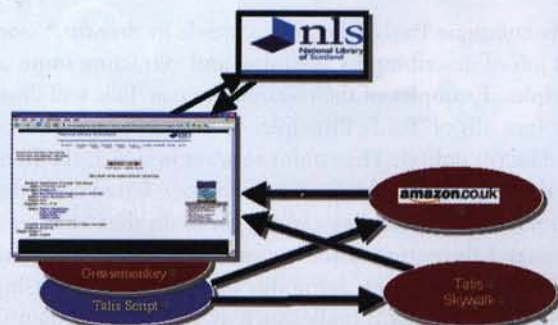
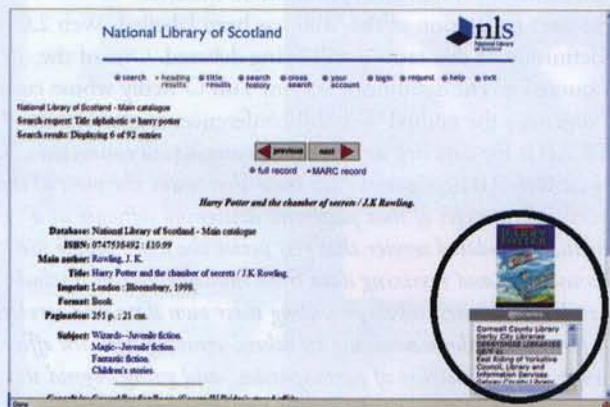
There is another important point here too. Traditionally these kinds of solutions are procured through a formal tender process that would have typically included a detailed specification of requirements (produced by committee after many months of deliberation) and a complex contract, which would be awarded to a supplier that would then build the application and deliver it after many months or even years. This is a long, complex and costly exercise; the approach of mixing various components challenges that paradigm. Is Google a subcontractor to Talis here? Clearly the answer is no.

Are libraries and local authorities ready to rise to this challenge? Whilst Web 2.0 is driven by technology, it is not *about* technology. It is about changing business models and attitudes to data and software and the way that the library domain, the public and commercial sectors work together. It really is about participation, or as Tim O'Reilly puts it, an "architecture of participation". If libraries make their data available and software companies provide an increasing range of open, standards-based 'Web services' then we can evolve a new generation of solutions for our users.

I believe there is grandeur in this vision of libraries; this is 'library 2.0'.

Further information

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References

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