

UCISA – CISG 2009 Conference, St Andrews

Birds of a Feather: Collaboration Tools

These are brief notes based on the discussion at both Birds of a Feather sessions on Collaboration Tools and do not purport to represent all of the views of everyone who took part. Thank you to all those who expressed an opinion, if you wish to correct or add to this please email Sam Denniss from the committee page <http://www.ucisa.ac.uk/groups/cisg/committee.aspx>

Collaboration tools fell into two categories:

Locally implemented solutions: Microsoft Sharepoint was dominant in this area. No one present was using Microsoft Groove.

Social networking tools: Facebook, Twitter etc.

There were very diverging opinions on these in terms of freedom versus control. The first session focussed more on controlled local implementation and the second session debated the pros and cons of uncontrolled use.

Sharepoint was synonymous with 'control' and allowed the implementation of

- Policies
- Protection
- Responsibilities
- Appropriate use
- Formal identity management
- Anchored services for formal e-learning (although alternatives like iTunes are popular in US institutions)

In the wider argument for freedom of choice and one of the sessions focussed around the pros and cons of these:

- Unpredictability and changing trends – need for an exit strategy
- Need to maintain a presence
- Agencies to monitor 'brand'
- Accessibility – it's there so let's use it
- Availability - Case of students themselves asking for Facebook to be banned in PC/teaching centres
- Freedom – researchers and students will use what they want to in any case
- Validity – who is "Fred" v. self-verifying "Fred is recognised by his community"
- Formal versus informal identities and networking – social versus academic
- Need to meet students in their world

- Appropriate versus inappropriate use - need for policies (JADU survey and report)
- Trendy versus “recognised solution”
- Overlapping communities, Facebook, MySpace, Bebo
- Self determining by size of community
- Possibilities to “crowd source” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crowdsourcing> has definition and lots of examples) and collaborate informally – seeding with own applications against the investment this would need (exit strategy again).
- Size of community does not always reflect sustainability (large communities) or future growth potential (small communities).
- “Collaboration is a community not a tool”

Emerging possibilities:

Google wave <http://wave.google.com/> (by invitation only at present)

Research collaborations:

Many new sites appearing and engaging academics

- <http://www.academia.edu/>
- <http://academic-networking.blogspot.com/>
- <http://www.vitae.ac.uk/>

Institutional internal collaborations hosted externally

Yammer: enterprise blogging <https://www.yammer.com>

Sharepoint installations

Features and Issues:

- Accessibility: time taken to implement, no true “out of the box solution”
- Downgrading in non-IE browsers – noted that Firefox has an IE add-in.
- Ability to authenticate external users
- Storage