Improving the End User Experience with Social Software

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How Do We Do It Now?

- telephone
- in person
- e-mail
- on-line forums/newsgroups
- Web pages
How Do Students Get Help?

- lab consultants
- e–mail
- telephone
- on–line forums (peer–to–peer)
- ResCom
- ANGEL support
- Learning Support Center
What Do Students Use?

- cell phones
- instant messaging
- iPods/MP3 players
- lab machines
- peer–to–peer learning
How Do Faculty Get Help?

- Departmental IT people
- HelpDesk
- ANGEL support
- MediaTech
Philosophy on User Support

*Give a man a fish he eats for a day...*

*Teach a Man to fish, he eats for a lifetime.*
People who need help are...

- our customers
- don’t care where they get it from
- don’t necessarily need to know how to fish
- individuals
- a virtual community?
People who give help are...

- our co–workers
- our peers
- a virtual community?

The key is an “Artful Handoff”
Social Software enables people to rendezvous, connect or collaborate through computer-mediated communication and to form on–line or virtual communities.

- Blogs and wikis
- social bookmarking / democratic indexing / tagging
- Internet forums
What’s a Blog?

A Blog or Web Log

- allows a person or persons (group) to create or electronically post an article
- may allow others to comment on article
- allows discussion to proceed “linearly”
What’s a Wiki?

A wiki is

• A group editable Web space
• An on–line tool which allows users to “iterate to the truth”
• A knowledge management database which leverages collective intelligence
H.L. Mencken was Wrong

“No one in this world, so far as I know, has ever lost money by underestimating the intelligence of the great masses of the plain people.” — H.L. Mencken
What’s the difference?

Why use one or the other?

- Blogs
  - I’m responsible for an entry
  - others responsible for comments, etc.
  - entry often “first draft” quality
- Wikis
  - useful where things converge to the truth.
  - writing can be continually revised
Blog Case Studies

- Case study — TLT Symposium site
- Case study — cio.wisc.edu
- Case study — Sun blogs
- Case study — IE7 forum
Wiki Case Studies

- Case study — Wikipedia
- Case study — consultant Wiki
- Case study — a knowledge base
Podcasting may allow support people to create audio or video help clips which will walk a user through a product or problem. Because students can do this on their own time, they don’t necessarily need to speak to someone unless they don’t understand.

- Podcasts could address current and common problems.
- Podcasts allow students to “time shift.”
- One doesn’t need an iPod to listen to a podcast.
Democratic Indexing involves a collaboratively determined, open–ended labeling system used to categorize content. Rather than a taxonomy of metadata keywords, democratic indexing uses a “folksonomy” of tags to describe URLs, images, video clips, etc. Use of a folksonomy can create a “personal” search engine relevant to the end user and a virtual community.

- del.icio.us, rojo, CiteULike — social bookmarking
- flickr, zooomr — photo/image sharing
- YouTube — video sharing and indexing
Vox Populi

Several sites use registered users to “vote” on the relevance or importance of something and then rank them accordingly.

- digg — reader controlled editorial weighting for technical stories
- Amazon — user reviews, members who find those reviews useful, “Top reviewers"
- Amazon search — People who bought this also bought this...
What about “popularity” software and user services? While we can only speculate, here are some possibilities

- Top N problems in the last 7 days are
- N people found this answer “helpful"
- These are the “Top Lab Consultants" this month
Conclusions

- Will users seek help differently?
- People are already embracing social software — let that be our guide
- New solutions might cater to “power users" with out of the ordinary problems, but it might also cater to us in the user services community. That’s OK.
- Collective intelligence will be important for user problems and user support decisions.
Questions?

Some URLs:
<http://del.icio.us/jleous/psuserservconf>
<http://del.icio.us/tag/psuserservconf>