Collaborative Tools Used to Organize a Library Camp Unconference

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Abstract

From July to October, 2008, Laura Crossett, Joseph Kraus and Steve Lawson organized the Library Camp of the West (http://librarycampwest.pbwiki.com/). This was an unconference that took place on October 10, 2008 at the University of Denver. The authors used many technology tools to organize the event, such as email, wikis, blogs, two tools from Google, the Doodle scheduling Website, Flickr and more. This article will explain how they used those tools to prepare for the unconference.

What is an Unconference?

Joseph Kraus first heard of the unconference concept in July of 2006. (Winer, 2006) At first, he was intrigued by the idea, but when he read the "Highly Structured" section of the blog entry, it turned him off from the concept.

During the summer of 2008, Joseph Kraus met Laura Crossett and Steve Lawson in the Library Society of the World (LSW) Meebo chat room, and they reignited his interest. The first two Library Camps took place at the Ann Arbor District Library in Michigan and in Darien, CT. John Blyberg (2006) was one of the engines under both of those unconferences. Steve Lawson and Laura Crossett read about those events, and they wanted to host an unconference for librarians in the Rocky Mountain West. Steve and Laura provide background to their discussion of the topic on their blogs. (http://stevelawson.name/seealso/archives/2008/07/library_camp_of_the_west_denver_10_october_2008.html and http://www.newrambler.net/lisdom/224).

For more background on library-based unconferences, Walt Crawford wrote two articles (2009) on the Palinet Leadership Net-work. Kathryn Greenhill and Constance Wiebrands (2008) also note that:

> Unconferences are gatherings of people united by a passion, where the content and structure of the day is driven by the participants. An unconference is often facilitated using the Open Space Technology model. This uses the four flow principles:
>
> - Whoever comes are the right people
> - Whatever happens is the only thing that could have
> - Whenever it starts is the right time
> - When it's over, it's over

Since Steve Lawson in based in Colorado Springs, Colorado and Laura Crossett is based in Northern Wyoming, they figured Denver would be good location. Joseph Kraus is the Science & Engineering Librarian in the Penrose Library at the University of Denver (DU). Once a date was set, Joseph was able to secure the rooms needed for the unconference. He is also an adjunct instructor in the LIS program at DU, so he was able to recruit many of the LIS students to participate. Thus, the Library Camp of the West (LCOW) was born (http://librarycampwest.pbwiki.com/).

During the course of planning the library camp, an article by Aaron Louie (2008) provided the authors with some substantial planning advice.

The earliest known use of the word "unconference" is from 1974. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) held an unconference in Michigan. They had "lots of workshops, few speeches, cooperative work, informality, drinking, music, [and] volleyball." The Library Camp of the West did not have music nor volleyball, but it did restrict canned speeches. The LCOW attendees learned from each other in a cooperative and informal setting. In many respects, the 1974 NCTE unconference was similar to the 2008 Library Camp of the West.

The three authors never met in person (nor even talked on the phone) until the day of the event. They used a variety of technology tools to communicate and work with each other.

Tools Used to Organize the Unconference

Doodle (http://www.doodle.com) – In order to schedule times for the three of us to meet online, Steve Lawson sent the authors doodle links so they could "vote" on times when they were free. It is a three step process. In the first step, general information is put into the form including the title of the event, description, name and email address. Dates are selected in the second step. The third step allows one to set a variety of times for the possible meeting. Once the process is done, then invitations can be sent to the group with a link, such as http://www.doodle.com/dy5x9wpn7qa2m eg6. This quickly shows what times are best for the meeting.

Meebo Chat Rooms – Joseph Kraus read Meredith Farkas's blog entry concerning the Library Society of the World (http://meredith.wolfwater.com/wordpres s/2008/04/10/computers-in-libraries-my-brain-is-full/). The Library Society of the World wiki (http://librarysociety.pbwiki.com) had a

Meebo Chat Room (http://www.meebo.com/room/librarysoci etyoftheworld). This is where Joseph met with Steve and Laura for the initial discussion of the unconference. The three of them also used private Meebo chat rooms to discuss details as the conference date approached.

Email and discussion lists – The authors needed to schedule the rooms during a day when all three of them would be able to get together. Once the date was set for October 10, 2008, Joseph worked with Deborah Bain, Driscoll Student Center Operations Coordinator at the University of Denver, to make sure the facility could handle 100-150 people. Joseph also worked with several of the faculty from the LIS Program in the Morgridge College of Education to advertise the event to interested LIS students. The authors sent many emails to library-based discussion lists to advertise the unconference. We contacted many vendors to see if they could sponsor a vendor table during the day.

Google Docs (http://docs.google.com) – Google Docs was used to hold copies of draft invoices, how to access the wireless internet at the facility, name labels, a list of restaurants, a planning document that had the results of several brainstorming sessions, and a financial spreadsheet.

Google Maps (http://maps.google.com/) – The general schedule and time frame from the successful 2008 Library Camp Kansas (http://librarycampks.wetpaint.com/) was repurposed for LCOW. However, the authors wanted to schedule lunch at 11:30 so participants could descend upon area restaurants well before Noon. To make finding a lunch spot easier, a public-editable Google Map of restaurants was posted at http://librarycampwest.pbwiki.com/Lunch .

PBwiki – Many librarians use PBwiki. For example, when the Colorado Alliance held the "Round Table Discussion on Web 2.0 in Libraries," Steve Lawson set up a PBwiki

page for the meeting attendees (http://allianceroundtable.pbwiki.com). Joseph initially set up a PBwiki page for the unconference using version 2.0 of the software (http://librarycampofthewest.pbwiki.com), but Steve and Laura recommended version 1.0. This way, attendees could edit the software using a keyword without having to register their name and email address.

Other Wikis – The authors read other wikis that provided information on other Library Camps. In particular, they looked at the wikis for Library Camp Kansas (mentioned above), Library Camp NYC (http://librarycampnyc.wikispaces.com) and many others. The LISwiki provided links to other library-based Library Camps (http://liswiki.org/wiki/Library_Camp).

Blog software – Without Meredith Farkas and her report of the 2008 CIL conference in her blog, *Information Wants to Be Free*, Joseph might have never met Steve and Laura. Once the unconference was done, many attendees provided unconference reports on their blogs. Some are from Matthew Hamilton at http://matthewdhamilton.com/wp/2008/10/12/thoughts-on-the-unconference/, Joshua Neff at http://thelsw.org/node/49, and from Judy VanAcker at http://www.coloradolibraries.org/2008/10/29/fun-at-camp/.

Flickr – Images were posted at Flickr (http://flickr.com/photos/tags/lcow08/) and the wiki provided a slide show of the images at http://librarycampwest.pbwiki.com/LCOW08+Everywhere.

Social networks – Joseph posted a Facebook event page at http://www.facebook.com/inbox/#/event.php?eid=18457468636. Laura set up a Yahoo Groups page at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/lcow08/ and Joseph set up a FriendFeed discussion room at http://friendfeed.com/rooms/lcow.

Sticky Notes – At the beginning of the unconference, Steve created a grid of the sessions and the rooms so participants could brainstorm session topics. Using the grid, all of the attendees put the schedule into place. This was done by putting sticky notes onto a big notepad at the front of the ballroom.
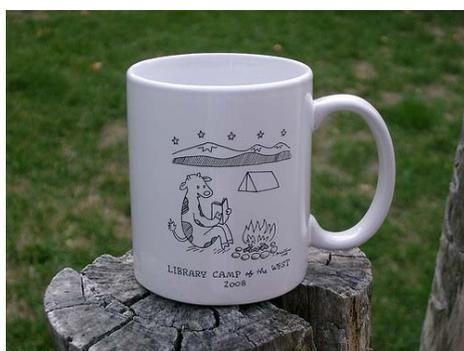

http://flickr.com/photos/hatchibombotar/2929973824/

Coffee Mugs and T-shirts – Steve Lawson contacted Denver comic book artist John Porcellino (http://www.king-cat.net/), and he was kind enough to create a logo for the unconference. He gave us permission to use the image on t-shirts (http://www.cafepress.com/librarycampwest/) and on coffee mugs.

Next Time?

Attendees might be encouraged to use Twitter and hash tags to keep track of the discussions. Librarians might record some of the unconference on video so others can see what the event was like. Wherever and whenever the next Library Camp of the West is, we would like to see even more open dialog and greater discussion and brainstorming of solutions.

LIBRARY CAMP of the WEST
2008

http://www.flickr.com/photos/hatchibom botar/2891036790/

http://www.flickr.com/photos/jokrausdu/ 2894140670/

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