

Creating Knowledge Centre Information Portals with Netvibes

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Abstract

Over the past couple of years, Shrewsbury and Telford Health Libraries have been using Netvibes software to create information portals, initially to provide a solution to current awareness provision, and latterly to create 'Knowledge Centres' geared towards our NHS Trust's new clinical structure.

As well as providing information portals tailored towards different clinical areas, the Knowledge Centres have raised the profile of the Library within the Trust. As a result of this project the Library is seen as an innovative team whose services are shaped to meet corporate structures and goals.

Background

Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust is a two-site acute Trust with hospitals in Shrewsbury and Telford, as well as some services provided from Community Hospitals.

The Netvibes project had three aims:

- Provide a current awareness service across a wide range of specialities without staff time being used to create an email or printed bulletin
- Raise awareness of electronic journals
- Raise awareness of new books added to Library stock

Using RSS feeds as the basis of a current awareness service seemed a logical solution, as they provide an easy way to get to continually updated information. Doing this also provides a way to promote their use to healthcare staff, and to make it possible for staff to use RSS feeds without having to know what they were or how to set up an aggregator.

After some investigation into whether this was feasible using the Library's website or blog (which showed that it wasn't), Netvibes (www.netvibes.com) was evaluated. Netvibes offers an easy way to create a public website using RSS feeds and other content.

Netvibes is marketed as a way of creating a personal start page or 'dashboard'. It is similar to iGoogle (www.google.com/ig) in

that users can have it as the first page upon opening their browser, and are able to see all their preferred news sources and social networks (such as their Facebook updates) in one place. In addition, it also allows the creation of a public site.

Netvibes offers a free service, and is relatively straightforward and quick to use. The time-consuming part was identifying RSS feeds from useful journals and other sources to place on each of the subject 'tabs'. In May 2009, 'Team Knowledge Update' was launched (to reflect the then current emphasis on Team Knowledge Officers in the NHS).

Over time, the site grew to cover 30 topics, and email alerts using Yahoo! Pipes (<http://pipes.yahoo.com>) and Feedburner (<http://feedburner.google.com>) software were developed for most of these. Unfortunately the library management system could not provide acceptable RSS feeds for new book alerts. While Feed 43 (www.feed43.com) was used to 'scrape' RSS feeds from the catalogue, this did not always work satisfactorily, and eventually it was concluded that it was not currently possible to promote new books via RSS feeds.

Team Knowledge Update provided a way to showcase e-journal subscriptions, which was especially useful as the Library moved towards electronic journal subscriptions for most titles in 2011. It also acted as a 'virtual current journals display' (usefully arranged by subject) which allowed users to browse the latest articles from a range of journals, and to access the full-text of subscribed journals, in some cases with a single-click.

Decisions over which journals to include were initially based on whether the title was one the Library subscribed to (either in print or online), favouring those where the current content was available online via NHS Athens accounts. Further key journals have since been added, regardless of their subscription status.

RSS feeds from other services were easily incorporated into Team Knowledge Update. These included feeds from the National Library for Health's RSS directory, and the CASH (Current Awareness Service for Health) site (www.tin.nhs.uk/welcome/keeping-up-to-date).

For more advanced library users, Netvibes offers the ability to copy feeds and other items from one page ('widgets') and add them to their own Netvibes or iGoogle page.

The move towards Knowledge Centres

The Trust underwent a reorganisation of its clinical structure in 2011, and the decision was made to reconfigure Team Knowledge Update to Knowledge Centres to reflect the new groupings under 11 Clinical Centres.

Netvibes only allows one public page per email address, so new email addresses were created using Yahoo! Mail, and these were used to create 11 new Netvibes sites, one for each centre (<http://tinyurl.com/knowledgecentres>). Subsequently further Knowledge Centres for Leadership

(www.netvibes.com/sathleadership), and to support the Leading Improvement in Patient Safety (LIPS)

(www.netvibes.com/sathlips) project that a member of library staff was involved with were created.

The new, more focussed, sites have allowed further additions to be made to content, and these have included:

- Embedded web pages (for example, relevant Royal Colleges, and the Library home page) so users can view other web content within the Knowledge Centre itself (although it is clear to users they are viewing an external website)
- A search tools page containing search boxes for major databases and the catalogue
- News pages (with RSS feeds from NeLM, NHS Choices, Royal Colleges and other sources)
- Resource lists or new books lists (with embedded search results from the catalogue)

The ease with which Netvibes can be used has meant that some of the para-professional staff have been provided with training, and have been able to have a go at creating subject pages.

Feedback

A full evaluation of the Knowledge Centres has yet to be undertaken, but since they went live in April 2011 usage has

been, on average, around 505 visits per month. Google Analytics is used to monitor usage, and this provides basic figures but due to the way Netvibes works, it is not possible to tell us which tab, or indeed, which Knowledge Centre has been visited.

The Library Services Manager has met with the new Clinical Centre Chiefs and has demonstrated the Knowledge Centres to them. Feedback from these meetings has been positive, and a number of suggestions for additional content have been received.

The visibility of the Knowledge Centres has been increased as they have been linked from the relevant clinical centre webpages on the intranet. The Leadership Knowledge Centre in particular has been a success, with the Leadership Development Manager keen to use it as the basis for a proposed Virtual Learning Hub, in preference to a commercial system.

However, the biggest response so far has been from other library services keen to develop Netvibes-based services. Since beginning the project in 2009, enquiries, assistance or training have been provided to around 28 library services, both in the healthcare and academic sectors. Library staff have participated in several training events and demonstrations to share experiences about the Netvibes project.

Challenges, and the future

Once a Netvibes page is set up, it usually requires little maintenance as the RSS feeds automatically pull in new information. However, when journal subscriptions change, it does require work to amend each subject tab affected and this can have major implications when resources change at a national level.

There have been occasions when Netvibes has stopped working on our network, and the Trust's IT department have had to work out why this is. Thankfully, IT have not blocked Netvibes, as they have many other Web 2.0 applications.

Although Netvibes itself remains free of charge, it is introducing paid accounts for business intelligence services, and there is no guarantee Netvibes will always be free, or even whether it will always be available.

Compared to more traditional methods of delivering current awareness, the Knowledge Centres do require users to visit the sites regularly to view what's new (they are an example of pull technology), although we have developed email alerts for some of the topics (an example of push technology).

Sharing our experiences

Because of the number of enquiries from other library services, a small wiki (www.teamknowledgeupdate.pbworks.com) was

developed to share what has been learnt about Netvibes and other tools for current awareness such as Yahoo! Pipes, Feed43 and Feedburner.

One of the advantages of Netvibes is that it allows the sharing of whole public sites using OPML files (OPML is a file format for sharing information about list of RSS feeds) through a simple export / import feature, or the sharing of individual tabs via email. Library services can share a site or tab with another service, saving a great deal of work. The OPML files and emailed tabs for the Knowledge Centres can be supplied to other libraries, please contact the author for further information.

All links last accessed: 22nd March 2012.