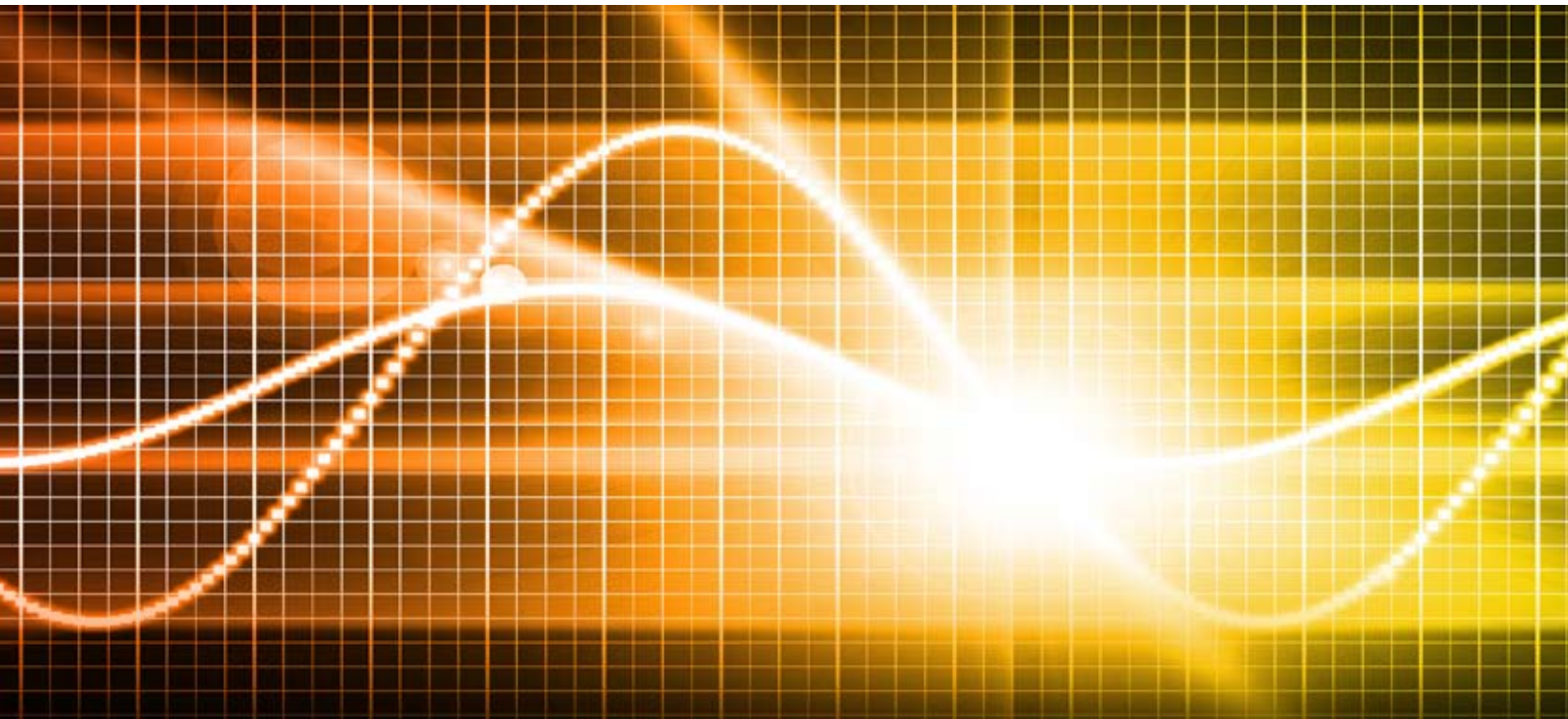


If you build it, will they come? How researchers perceive and use Web 2.0

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A Research Information Network briefing

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The Research Information Network's report, *If you build it, will they come? How researchers perceive and use web 2.0*, investigates the use of, and attitudes towards, web 2.0 tools and services among the research community. Using a quantitative survey of researchers, in-depth interviews with academics and case studies of five web 2.0 communities, it finds that **while most researchers have a positive attitude towards web 2.0 services, only a few have made them a routine part of their working life.**

It is suggested that web 2.0 tools, which allow internet users to create, share and repurpose information, have enormous potential for academic researchers, enabling them to communicate their research and its findings more rapidly, broadly and effectively than before. However, this report suggests that for most researchers the benefits of using web 2.0 tools are not yet sufficiently clear to incentivise uptake. Even frequent users tend to see web 2.0 services as an addition to, rather than a replacement for, traditional scholarly communications techniques.

Adoption of web 2.0 services by researchers depends upon their being easy to use, and offering near zero adoption costs. The research also suggests that high levels of collaboration and support from local colleagues are associated with uptake. Many researchers who use web 2.0 indicate that it raises their profile, and facilitates collaborations across the globe. Other researchers value the informality of the medium and the scope for comments and interactions before research results are published formally.

A summary of recommendations is overleaf. A full report will be available July 2010.

However, there are two important sets of barriers to uptake of web 2.0 tools. The first is lack of clarity around benefits, particularly where insufficient users mean that positive network effects have not yet emerged. The second is perceptions and concerns about quality and trust. As consumers, many researchers do not trust information that has not been subject to peer review, and as producers many are cautious about sharing results and findings in a medium which, as yet, has no standardised way to formally attribute authorship.

We are still at an early stage in the development of web 2.0 tools and services, and the uses to which they are put. They do not presage a sea change in scholarly communications, at least in the short to medium term. The processes of experimentation and innovation are currently highly localised and dispersed, and likely to be protracted.

But if experimentation and innovation are to be supported and encouraged, and not stifled, universities, funders and members of the research community will need to:

- encourage open-ended experimentation, and avoid the risk of stifling innovation by attempts to impose particular systems or concepts of how they will be used;
- establish mechanisms through which researchers can share information about useful developments in services and tools;
- undertake further research to understand the ways in which use of web 2.0 develops;
- consider how policy and practice might be developed to ensure that innovation takes full account of – and does not undermine – the long-established key functions of the scholarly communications process, including registration, certification, and preservation.

We recommend in particular that university computing and information services should:

- raise awareness of tools and services, and the uses to which they can be put;
- publicise examples of successful use and good practice;
- provide guidance and training;
- help set standards for curation and preservation.

Universities and funders should:

- Develop policy frameworks to encourage a balance between innovation and openness on the one hand, and integrity and security on the other, taking account of issues including:
 - knowledge transfer and socio-economic impact;
 - confidentiality, security and intellectual property rights;
 - assessment, recognition and reward systems;
 - training and staff development;
 - the diverse needs and practices of researchers in different disciplines and communities;
 - data curation and sharing.

Researchers should:

- consider the full range of tools and services available to support their research and scholarly communications;
- share good practice and learn from each other in use of web 2.0 tools.

Get in touch with us

If you have any questions or would like to get involved in our work, please contact Branwen Hide, Liaison and Partnerships Officer (email branwen.hide@rin.ac.uk or telephone 020 7412 7759).

About the Research Information Network

The Research Information Network has been established by the higher education funding councils, the research councils, and the UK national libraries. We investigate how efficient and effective the information services provided for the UK research community are, how they are changing, and how they might be improved for the future. We help to ensure that researchers in the UK benefit from world-leading information services, so that they can sustain their position as among the most successful and productive researchers in the world. All our publications are available on our website at www.rin.ac.uk