Visually Challenged Library Members on Google Groups

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Abstract

This Paper deals with purpose of using Google Groups by the visually challenged library users at Anna Centenary Library, Chennai. The extent of use of the social media for communicating various facilities and services, including extension programmes amongst the visually challenged is highlighted. Paper specifies in brief the responses of the library staff with regard to the use of Google Groups for communicating various library extension services.

Keywords

Visually Challenged, Social Media, Google Groups, Youth for Seva.

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1. Anna Centenary Library, Chennai

The new library building was constructed on modern lines to cater to the needs of the public and academic community. A large number of academic institutions are there in the vicinity of the library, including Indian Institute Technology and Engineering and research institutions. The library is built over a massive area of 3.75 lakh square feet. The library is to house 1.20 million books and other information sources. The collection encompasses books on all major languages of India, besides providing access to few lakh ‘e-books’ and thousands of ‘e-journals’. A “very special feature” of this library is that it would straight away have a digital edge, being a partner of the World Digital Library. This will facilitate access to primary sources of knowledge of countries and cultures across the world.

The library is fully air conditioned and the floors are covered with carpets. The services include a Braille Section on the ground floor for the visually challenged. The facilities, to be specific are that the library Braille Section is

- Conveniently located in the ground floor
- Disabled friendly ramp facility available
- Braille converters, Braille printers and Braille readers available
- Audio CDs with book contents for listening
- Help desk for the Braille users
- Refreshable Braille Display
- More than 1500 printed books in Braille format, 1100 Audio books and 150 e-books

The Children’s Section accommodates books with a huge replica of the “Tree of Knowledge” rooted in its heart and a Hi-Tech Auditorium is constructed for conducting programmes for the members, including the visually challenged children.
2 The Library Members on the Google Groups

A group of qualified and trained professional library staff works in Braille Section. A large number of visually challenged users rely upon the services. There are volunteers from IT sectors, engineering colleges and industries for extending services to the visually challenged users mainly to read out texts and to write. Database of the volunteers is maintained by the Braille Section. On intimation they come and extend the services in the library. While conducting extension services, the volunteers come to the specified spot to render services. The members are also from ‘Youth for Seva’ Group. In order to facilitate communication among the visually challenged and the volunteers, Google Groups, is found helpful, and created by the library’s Braille Section.

Here is an example of posting on Google Groups for service by the volunteers to be rendered at M/s Swabhiman Trust and M/s Netradaya Institution for Blind. The information will be posted in a tabular form covering the details of:

- Main programme and task
- Venue, indicating the complete address
- Date and time
- Details of activities
- Number of volunteers required
- Nature of the service to be rendered, required skills and knowledge and
- Contact details

Example:

1. **Task:** Teaching and spending time with children with Autism

2. **Venue:** Swabhiman is a Trust, working for the welfare of people with autism, located a Palavakkam on ECR. They engage children in various activities such as crafts, yoga, sports, music and other play therapy.
3. **Date and Time:** Saturday; Timing – 10 AM to 1 PM; 2 PM to 4 PM

4. **Nature of Work:** Engage with the children by teaching and other activities

5. **Contact Details:** 9994650615

### 3 Youth for Seva (YFS):

YFS started in April 2007 as a platform to provide opportunities for youth who wanted to take active part in community development despite time constraints. Through this platform, YFS aims to empower youth to become positive change makers who will enable organizations and institutions to work without a vested interest. The goal of YFS is to support schools, NGOs, government hospitals and other organizations including public libraries in the social sector through volunteers who can help them mitigate some of their shortcomings and challenges. Volunteering is made easy and customized to the individual’s interests and time constraints.

The YFS functions with the following objectives:

- To facilitate a movement of volunteering.
- To empower and enable individuals to become positive change agents in the society.
- To enable institutions and libraries to effectively engage community to deliver services.
- To create models to address developmental needs through the culture of volunteering.
- To promote sustainable lifestyles among individuals and strengthen the required social institutions to sustain communities.

### 4 Social Media: The ‘Google Groups’:

The Google Groups is a service from Google Inc. that provides discussion groups for people sharing common interests. The Groups service also provides a gateway
to Usenet newsgroups via a shared user interface. Google Groups became operational in February 2001, following Google's acquisition of Deja's Usenet archive.

Google Groups offers at least two kinds of discussion group; in both cases users can participate in threaded conversations, either through a web interface or by e-mail. The first kind are forums specific to Google Groups which are inaccessible by NNTP and act more like mailing lists. The second kind are Usenet groups, for which Google Groups acts as gateway and unofficial archive. Through the Google Groups user interface, users can read and post to Usenet groups.

Prior to the acquisition of its archive by Google (in 2001) the Deja News Research Service was an archive of messages posted to Usenet discussion groups, started in March 1995 by Steve Madere in Austin, Texas.

While archives of Usenet discussions had been kept for as long as the medium existed, Deja News offered a novel combination of features. It was available to the general public, provided a simple World Wide Web user interface, allowed searches across all archived news groups, returned immediate results, and retained messages indefinitely. The search facilities transformed Usenet from a loosely organized and ephemeral communication tool into a valued information repository. The archive's relative permanence, combined with the ability to search messages by author, raised concerns about privacy and confirmed oft-repeated past admonishments that posters should be cautious in discussing themselves and others.

The service was eventually expanded beyond search. My Deja News offered the ability to read Usenet in the traditional chronological, per-group manner, and to post new messages to the network. Deja Communities were private Internet forums offered primarily to businesses. In 1999 the site (now known as Deja.com) sharply changed direction and made its primary feature a shopping comparison service.

By 2001, the Deja search service was shut down. In February 2001, Google acquired Deja News and its archive, and transitioned its assets to groups.google.com. Users were then able to access these Usenet newsgroups through the new Google Groups interface. By the end of 2001, the archive had been supplemented with
other archived messages dating back to May 11, 1981. These early posts from 1981–1991 were donated to Google by the University of Western Ontario, based on archives by Henry Spencer from the University of Toronto. A short while later, Google released a new version, which allowed users to create their own (non-Usenet) groups.

When AOL discontinued access to Usenet around 2005, it recommended Google Groups instead. In October 2010, Google announced it would be dropping support for welcome messages, pages, and files effective January 2011. In December 2010, Google rolled out a new UI preview with more GMail/Reader-like functionality. On June 26, 2013 Google Groups released a new version. One can use Google Groups to share information and interact with people who have common passion for a particular hobby, interest, or organization. And one can also share documents and send calendar invites to a group so one need not have to list people individually.

There's a lot one can do with Google Groups:

- Engage in discussions about a specific information services.
- Create a question and answer customer support group.
- Organize meetings, conferences, or social events among library members.
- Find people with similar hobbies, interests, or backgrounds.
- Read group posts through email, online interface, or both.

To get started with Google Groups as a regular participant, learn how to find and join a group. To get started with Google Groups as an administrator, librarians have to create a group. This help center provides assistance with two products: Google Groups and Google Product Forums. A new and redesigned Google Groups was released in February 2012 with an updated user interface. The majority of this help center is dedicated to helping users with this new Google Groups interface.

Google Product Forums is the name associated with specific Google groups used to provide technical support for Google products, such as Google Maps. Mobile friendly Access Groups from anywhere, using mobile device.
5. Effectiveness of the Services

The volunteers and the Library Professional staff were interviewed to know the usefulness and the effectiveness of the services. The areas of use of Google Groups here include

1. Number of users with Google Groups:

2. Specific purposes include: Placement information, Assistance to fill up forms such as UGC-NET, Recruit Boards, Training Programme Details and Conformations, Special Lectures, Information about Readers and Scribes, Book Talks, Meet-the Author Programmes, Music and Cultural Events, Orientation Sessions on Skill Improvement, Requests on Braille Press/Resource Centers, Release of Braille Books, New Magazines, Acts and Ordinances, Details of Resource Persons in the field like M/s. Enable India, Bangalore National Centre for Blind, Madurai.

3. Utilization of the Braille Section is overwhelming and the services are being extended person to person, for 13 hours a day.

4. Extension programmes are being conducted frequently. 43 programmes have been conducted during the past one year. The feedback is good regarding the performance of the library staff. The library is ISO 9001-2008 certified for quality performance.

References

