This is a repository copy of *Information-sharing and evidence base within assistive technology: some current tools*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/10285/

Article:

eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/

Simon Judge
*Senior Clinical Scientist, Barnsley District General Hospital,
Assistive Technology Team*

Information-sharing and evidence base within assistive technology: some current tools

Assistive technology is recognised as a specialism across the sectors (Department of Health, 2007; Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, 2005) and to this end it requires the acquisition and retention of specialist knowledge within a changing and progressive environment. A number of tools help practitioners and researchers to maintain and share this knowledge and these tools are growing and evolving with time. These can be divided into traditional tools, first generation ICT and second generation ICT.

Traditional tools include journals (such as the one you are reading), conferences (such as the UK RAATE conference, www.raate.org.uk), paper-based literature searching and face-to-face meetings. First generation ICT tools include 'static' web pages, email lists and database-based literature searching. Second generation ICT tools include Web 2.0 style user-generated content, including blogs, dynamic web, Wikis (peer-editable websites) and online and collaborative literature searching and publication.

First generation ICT tools

First generation ICT tools are now well established in the UK assistive technologies (AT) field. Assistech (www.jiscmail.ac.uk/archives/assistech.html) and Senit (lists.becta.org.uk/mailman/listinfo/senit) appear to be the biggest email lists related to AT: the Assistech list was started in 2000 and now has 223 subscribers. Messages are posted about a wide range of AT topics, mostly by practitioners, and most questions are generally responded to within a working week. These email-based lists have the advantage of being intrusive (in the sense that the poster determines when the message is delivered to the reader) and instantaneous. Email lists thus allow a perception of current issues and best practice to be built up within the community as well as addressing direct practical questions. Email

lists also offer a way for researchers to access and query practitioners, and although Assistech and Senit have been used for some participant recruitment, this is not a regular occurrence.

Second generation ICT tools

Second generation ICT tools are still emerging and their usefulness within research and AT is beginning to be recognised. There are a number of tools of note and with relevance to AT. Second generation tools are generally less intrusive: you can bring 'feeds' from many sources into one place to read when you choose, for example by using a newsreader such as Google Reader (www.google.com/reader). This is advantageous in terms of information management but can make things less instantaneous. Another characteristic of Web 2.0 style tools is that they are much more collaborative, expecting input from readers, rather than them being passive.

Another group of second generation ICT tools are blogs and news feeds. Blogs have the impression in some circles of generally being written by angst-ridden teenage techies but the reality is far from this. Many of the big names in some areas blog and in addition you will find blogs from a number of organisations and companies. As well as blogs, many websites will provide newsfeeds of new content (like a corporate blog). For example, Steve Lee (eduspaces.net/stevelee/weblog) blogs on his development of open source AT software, whereas Emptech (www.emptech.info/rss.php) provide an invaluable summary of new products, services and other AT news.

Wikis are peer-editable websites and can be edited by anyone registered on the site. The famous example is Wikipedia (wikipedia.org) which an article in Nature suggested was of comparable quality to Encyclopedia Britannica (Giles, 2005).

However, Wikis originated as information-sharing sites for small communities interested in a common topic. The Assistech WIKI (www.assistech.org.uk) was launched in 2005 and there is also an American equivalent, the ATWiki (atwiki.assistivetech.net/ATWiki_Home). Wikis allow knowledge to be built up through collaborative editing of pages, providing evolving best practice documents.

Another key tool within second generation ICT use is online citation sharing. As well as the ability to search for research papers online, revolutionised by Google Scholar (scholar.google.co.uk) and publish them, for example on CiteSeer (citeseer.ist.psu.edu), it is also possible to store your research library online. An example is CiteULike (www.citeulike.org), a free service that launched in 2005 which allows users to quickly and easily store citations from most online databases. You can see an example at www.citeulike. org/user/simonjudge. A user can also import/export to their 'off-line' citation manager, 'tag' papers into categories and post papers to groups. There is an assistive technology group (www.citeulike.org/group/408/library). This makes managing citations much easier and also allows for easy sharing of evidence.

Summary

Hopefully this short review will have given you a taster of how information-sharing and evidence-base tools are evolving, and the possible benefits of this new generation of tools. These provide a new way of sharing information about assistive technology and also of building up an evidence base for assistive technology provision.

Address for correspondence

Simon Judge
Senior Clinical Scientist
Barnsley District General Hospital
Assistive Technology Team
Email: simon.judge@nhs.net

References

Department of Health (2007) *Specialised Services National Definition Set: 7 Complex specialised rehabilitation for brain injury and complex disability (adult).* London: Department of Health. Available from: www.dh.gov.uk/en/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAndSocialCareTopics/SpecialisedServicesDefinition/DH_4001834 (accessed November 2007).

Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (2005) *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People.* London: TSO. Available from: www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4101751 (accessed November 2007).

Giles J (2005) Internet encyclopaedias go head to head. *Nature* **438** 900–901 (15 December 2005).