

# Members' Briefing

## AALLNET Redesign

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### Code Name: AALLNET 2.0

By Kathie J. Sullivan

When I was in library school, the term "information explosion" had just been coined. The Internet was in embryonic form, and there was no Facebook, Twitter, Ning, or LinkedIn. When people talked about social networking, they still meant cocktail conversations. If we didn't understand the concept of information explosion then, we sure do now.

The explosion is all about content. Information professionals started recognizing the importance of leveraging content when we embraced Knowledge Management. Now we want our content to be portable (Kindles loaded with our books of the week and Web-based collections of data), immediate (RSS feeds, Tweets, blogs), and collaborative (Facebook, Twibes, Nings). In theory, we think we can cope with the magnitude of data if we have the right tools.

In its present form, AALLNET, the Web site for the American Association of Law Libraries, lacks the right tools for our needs. AALLNET has thousands of pieces of information available to members but it's no secret it has needed a makeover for some time. We know there are broken links, search results are convoluted and sometimes undated, and we have a hard time producing our own institutional records. It's no one's fault; it's just time to pull AALLNET into the current state of Web design and functionality. The site needs bread crumbs, value-added features, real-time information feeds, archives, enhanced member services, personalized content, and database management for both members and AALL Headquarters. Members want to utilize multimedia, stream continuing education content, and have virtual spaces for committees to meet and work. We want tools to enable members to push information to their groups in meaningful ways. We want an intuitive system without a steep learning curve, and we want AALLNET to become a destination for members, stakeholders, and the general public. In response, the request for proposals (RFP) that the AALLNET Strategic Planning Special Committee prepared reflects this tall order,

and we were not displeased with the responses: AALLNET 2.0 will offer these desirable and necessary features.

President James Duggan has had a vision for redeveloping AALLNET for some time. When he appointed the special committee, we didn't have any charge other than "fix AALLNET." Nonetheless, the committee outlined specifics and was heading in the right direction when we met with our consultant in December 2008 to draft the points to be covered in an RFP for design companies. We've been looking at new navigation, graphics, branding, Web 2.0 functionality (see "What Is Web 2.0" on page 2), ease of use for all member entities (see "A Day in Your Life with AALLNET 2.0" on page 4), migrating and archiving content (see "The AALLNET Content Inventory Audit" on page 3), content management systems (see "What Is a Content Management System" on page 2) and real-time transactions with AALL Headquarters and our association management system, iMIS. In short, rather than continue to apply first aid to the current site, we are building AALLNET 2.0.

For me, this evaluation and vendor selection process has been a real learning experience. I now understand wireframes, tag clouds, floating frames, inline editing, and more. I'm still learning about .net Web content management, W3C compliance, and CSS. Many of you may be in the same boat with me: understanding more Web functionality than we can execute. We won't have to worry though; with the addition of a content management system, members with varying technical skills will be able to manage their content with ease.

Look for AALLNET 2.0 to roll out early next year. I know you'll be excited by the changes and improvements. We'll continue to have debates about whether it's nobler to blog, Twitter, e-mail, or add a friend, but we'll know it's nothing more than managing our content. ■

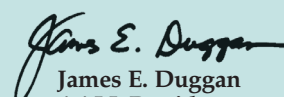
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### The Future of AALLNET

Ask any AALL member about AALLNET, and he or she would probably rank it as one of the top benefits of AALL membership (if not the top benefit). Begun in the mid-1990s as a joint project between AALL and Washburn School of Law, AALLNET quickly became the premiere communication instrument for the Association by offering access to policies and publications and listings of chapters and committees. The site hosted our first ever electronic roundtable discussion in May 1996 (see Frank G. Houdek's *The First Century: One Hundred Years of AALL History, 1906-2005*) and eventually grew to include the AALL Job Hotline; membership directory; and full-text access to *AALL Spectrum*, *Law Library Journal*, and other publications. According to Hazel Johnson, the first AALLNET Committee chair, the committee was charged with overseeing the Web site in July 2000, and eventually AALL hired its first AALLNET coordinator in 2005. Periodic surveys of members indicate that members use AALLNET on a regular basis, with some members (like me) using it daily (sometimes even hourly!).

After nearly 15 years, however, it's time for AALLNET to have a makeover. One of my presidential initiatives was to take a look at AALLNET and see if we could make it more usable, less cumbersome, and a site where members continue to point their Web browsers. We need a strong content management system, as well as a more intuitive indexing and organizational structure. It would also be nice to provide for permanent archiving of AALLNET Web pages so that future users would have access to Web pages long after they were replaced.

In the spring of 2008 I appointed a select committee of seasoned law librarians who had major Web experience to examine the future of AALLNET and oversee the redesign of what will become AALLNET 2.0. Ably chaired by Kathie Sullivan, the AALLNET Strategic Planning Special Committee has been diligently working with Tory Trotta, chair of the AALLNET Committee, and AALL Headquarters staff, most notably Kate Hagan and Chris Siwa, to ensure that AALLNET becomes a truly spectacular site for all AALL members. This *Members' Briefing* updates the committee's progress and forecasts a bright working future for AALLNET. ■



James E. Duggan  
AALL President, 2008-2009

## What Is Web 2.0?

By Darin K. Fox

“Web 2.0” means different things to different people, but one of the common threads that runs through many definitions is the emergence of Internet tools that foster collaboration and interaction. In a recent online discussion, Tim O’Reilly, CEO of the technical publisher O’Reilly Media, described Web 2.0 as “harnessing the collective intelligence of users.” In response, another Internet expert, Dan Zamboni, explained that “Web 1.0 was about connecting computers and making technology more efficient for computers. Web 2.0 is about connecting people and making technology more efficient for people.” (See blog discussion at <http://radar.oreilly.com/2005/10/web-20-compact-definition.html>.)

If the first version of the Web was the “read-only” version where publishers and organizations made content available for the end user to consume, then Web 2.0 refers to the collaborative, open version of the Web where users can easily create their own content and interact with content provided by companies, publishers, and other individuals. An example that clearly represents this change is the online encyclopedia, Wikipedia. If the Encyclopedia Britannica online represents Web 1.0, then Wikipedia represents Web 2.0 since it can be enhanced and edited by anyone.

There are many examples of Web 2.0 features that we have all become accustomed to using. Some common examples are: (1) reading a review of the Kindle 2 on Amazon.com written by a customer who recently purchased it; (2) commenting on an article discussing the economic bailout in the online version of *The New York Times* or in your local newspaper online; (3) using a “tag cloud” to enhance your library catalog search for books on copyright and file sharing, or (4) becoming a fan of your local public library on Facebook or writing on a friend’s “wall.” Web 2.0 tools include blogs, wikis, RSS feeds, Twitter, “tag clouds” for enhanced searching, and social networking sites like MySpace, LinkedIn, and Ning.

What’s important about Web 2.0 tools is that they empower communities of common interest. Some of these communities are short-lived and narrowly focused, such as the group of people who want to buy the latest version of the Apple iPhone and who want to discuss its pros and cons. However, some of these communities are much broader and long-lasting, such as the community of librarians who want “to promote and enhance the value of law libraries to the legal and public communities, to foster the profession of law librarianship, and to provide leadership in the field of legal information” (see [www.aallnet.org/about](http://www.aallnet.org/about)).

What does Web 2.0 mean for AALL? The AALLNET Strategic Planning Special Committee is mindful of the need to incorporate Web 2.0 tools into the newest version of the AALL Web site. Many law librarians have already embraced Web 2.0 tools and are using them to provide services for their libraries, to enhance teaching, and to communicate with colleagues. The AALLNET committee is evaluating all of the products for use in the new AALL Web site, which will include Web 2.0 tools and features that will make it easier for AALL communities of common interest (special interest sections, chapters, committees, and caucuses) to collaborate and communicate. With the upcoming enhancements to the AALL Web site, members will be able to establish blogs for their special interest sections or committees, create interactive calendars, set up a wiki for collaboration on special projects, and use “tag clouds” to find information within the Web site more easily. Finally, with the addition of a content management system, it will also be much easier for a larger group of people to update and develop the various parts of the AALL Web site. ■

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## What Is a Content Management System?

By June Hsiao Liebert

One of the biggest changes in the redevelopment of AALLNET will be the implementation of a content management system (CMS). A CMS is essentially a database that will organize, control, and distribute our content on the Web and simplify the management process. For most organizations, the two most important reasons to implement a CMS are to: (1) separate the content creation from

the technology/design of a Web site; and (2) create a distributed system in which content creators with varying skill levels can easily update and manage their own content.

In an association such as AALL, the designated content creators are typically volunteers who rotate regularly, so having an easy-to-use CMS allows anyone to participate in updating and creating content. The control pieces

within a CMS will ensure that all posted content goes through an appropriate approval process and meets specific design guidelines, such as Section 508 rules for Web site accessibility. Finally, separating the content from the design allows AALL to quickly implement fresh, new designs without having to touch every page.

The goal of having a Web site that is easier to manage and update is one that

the Computing Services Special Interest Section (CS-SIS) has worked closely with AALL to accomplish this past year. The idea was to find an inexpensive and easy-to-use solution that would allow more CS-SIS members to actively participate in the creation of Web content. As a pilot project, the CS-SIS began using blogging software as the new platform for the CS-SIS Web site. Although we are still evaluating results, this solution did allow more members to post directly to the CS-SIS Web site without any technical

training. For an organization the size of AALL, a CMS is similar to a blog on steroids—it has all the good features of a blog, plus far more capabilities.

The selection of an appropriate CMS is a huge challenge for AALL. Fortunately, we (the AALLNET Strategic Planning Special Committee) are working closely with a terrific consultant who is leading us through the selection process. We are looking for a CMS solution that will help us engage our members through personalized Web content, new social

networking environments, and more e-learning opportunities. By setting up a Web site that is easier to manage and update, we hope more members will be enabled to proactively participate in the creation of AALLNET content, which will, in turn, make the content more valuable to our entire membership and community. ■

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## The AALLNET Content Inventory Audit

By Tory Trotta

How many Web pages are currently on AALLNET, and how many of them need to be migrated to the new Web site? The answer to this question was an important part of the planning process for redesigning AALLNET and turned out to be more complicated than originally thought. The consensus of the AALLNET Strategic Planning Committee was that there is a significant amount of dated and/or redundant information throughout AALLNET. The cost to migrate everything without undertaking an audit would be prohibitive. Estimates of the current number of AALLNET Web pages were around 14,000.

The guiding principles that formed the inventory request were: 1) all current information should be migrated; 2) only content linked to active Web pages would be migrated; 3) dated material would be archived; and 4) outdated and/or redundant information would be deleted.

With these principles in mind, the AALLNET Advisory Committee

coordinated a content inventory audit to determine how many of the estimated 14,000 existing Web pages should be migrated into the new AALLNET. The Webmasters and chairs of all AALL caucuses, committees, and special interest sections were contacted and asked to inventory each and every Web page under their control. For each page, we asked them to provide the URL of the page; a description of the content; and whether the content on each individual Web page should be retained, updated, archived, or deleted. Moreover, they were asked to provide keywords that described each page.

This seemingly simple request quickly became complicated. Some AALL entities had already updated their Web sites. Some were just beginning the process. Some knew that they had outdated content that should be deleted. The scope of the project request quickly became an unwieldy burden on most entity Webmasters and was unrealistic given the project's short time frame. Subsequently the initial request was narrowed to identifying the number of

files of the following types as a first step: .doc, .gif, .jpg, .bmp, .png, .txt, .ppt, .pdf, .xls, .html, .shtml, and .asp. Each AALL entity created a spreadsheet or reported this information so that planners now have some idea of the number of content files that will have to be migrated at some point. Determining which files will be migrated for the initial release of new AALLNET will be dependent upon resources, and the committee encourages Webmasters to save their content files offline as a back-up until the new AALLNET is fully functional.

There will be other aspects to the content inventory project. All AALL entity Webmasters and leaders were very eager to contribute their inventory pages to the survey and worked hard to complete the task, and their hard work is appreciated. ■

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## A Day in Your Life with AALLNET 2.0

By Ken Hirsh

Jim is the Webmaster for a regional chapter of AALL, which hosts its chapter Web site on AALLNET. He needs to update several Web pages with new information. Jim points his browser at the AALL log-in page and enters his credentials. Next he views the site overview and selects the chapter's micro site. From there, he goes to each of the pages and makes the needed changes. In one case, he makes a mistake, but he is not overly concerned. He brings up the view of earlier versions of the page, selects one, and makes his edits on it. Then he sets it as the new live page. Finished with his editing, he goes on to the other work on his task list. Elapsed time: under 10 minutes.

Cathy is the acquisitions librarian for a large academic law library. Her duties include making vendor payments and managing the library's membership rosters in AALL and other associations. Two weeks ago she received the AALL renewal notice by e-mail, with an embedded link to the AALLNET membership management page. She clicks the link and signs on to the page. There she finds a complete membership roster. She checks the "remove member"

box next to the names of the two former employees who now work elsewhere. She moves down to the "Add Member" box and lists the three new staff members. Then she clicks the "Recalculate Dues" button and adds the total dues to her shopping cart. She checks out using her procurement card and in a few minutes receives an e-mail message confirming that dues have been paid. Elapsed time: 10 minutes, with no postage or check requisition.

Sarah is the chair of her special interest section education/programming committee. She wants to start an online forum for committee members to discuss ideas for next year's Annual Meeting. She's not sure of her committee members' e-mail addresses. Sarah signs on to AALLNET and moves to the Forums page. There she selects the "Create Forum" link and is asked a few questions: forum name, forum moderator, restricted or open membership. She chooses restricted and clicks the submit button. Next, she selects "Add Forum Members" and views a search box that lets her search for members by name. Finding each committee member in turn, she clicks the

"Add to Forum" button and sees the member's name and e-mail address added to the membership list. Completing that task, she moves to the "Post Message" page and publishes her "Welcome to the Forum" message. Within a few minutes each committee member receives her welcome message together with an e-mail with instructions about using the forum. Elapsed time...you get the picture.

Each of these scenarios shows life made a little easier for an AALL member, and each one of them will be possible in the new AALLNET as envisioned by the AALLNET Strategic Planning Special Committee. Committee members want AALLNET to take advantage of Web 2.0 technology to make all aspects of your Association membership more efficient, more productive, and more fun. Stay tuned for the announcement of a roll out schedule. ■

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