



Sharing knowledge and experiences in a special libraries network: the intranet of the xarxa biblioteques especialitzades de la generalitat (xbeg)

Maite Cuende
Biblioteca de Catalunya

Elisenda Macià
Departament de la Vicepresidència
Barcelona, Catalunya, Spain

Translated by: Marga Losantos

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Abstract

Some of the special libraries which depend on and support the Catalan government are operating in a shared network. In order to develop and make the cooperative work, the XBEG portal, the network intranet, was created in 2007. It is housed in the E-Catalunya Platform, a platform of social networks, based on open source software, with collaboration tools. The portal has been operating for two years, and now statistical data are presented and its use and future improvement actions trends are analyzed.

Introduction

Catalan government, called "Generalitat de Catalunya" has a network of 35 libraries and documentation centres specializing in different knowledge areas. They are attached to different departments, autonomous organizations and consortia, and may totally or partially depend on the Catalan government; thus it is an interconnecting public network.

The Biblioteques Especialitzades de la Generalitat (BEG) network began in 1998, as a librarian cooperative network, with the creation of a catalogue, shared by some former libraries that joined the project, which was promoted by the National Library of Catalunya. The joint use of a basic tool like the catalogue was, at that moment, the solution to different automation problems.

Simultaneously it meant the beginning of the collaborative / shared work that has allowed the consolidation of a *de facto* network, based on cooperation and the

collective professional action, similar to a real “Web 2.0 network” (that is, self-managed, self-feed back, voluntary and social).

Self-management means that the BEG libraries decide in which knowledge area they will work, who assesses the needs, who studies the possible solutions and who establishes proposals that, if approved, become standard operating procedure.

In self-feedback the results of these initiatives and the proceedings application are studied and evaluated, so as to introduce improvements constantly.

In order to define strategies and improvements, the network keeps a permanent record of benchmarking and observes other network libraries’ action trends, organization, products and services.

Participation in projects of continuous improvement is voluntary. Joint activities of assessment, analysis, proceedings and services and products development have generated a united social network.

Each library or documentation centre is subordinate to a superior entity and has its own budget. In the opinion of its professionals, the BEG network, although it does not have legal recognition nor material resources of its own, corresponds to the model of networks like the Internet. It was formed as the result of the conviction and the action of a group of professionals who decided to work together so as to make accessible the knowledge and resources they manage.

The participating libraries develop and apply cooperative projects, understood as collective actions with common benefits, from two points of view: improvements in the internal functioning of each library or documentation centre, and general improvements of proceedings and services shared in network.

The network is organized in a general assembly, a management committee and working groups.

The general assembly meets annually and all the libraries and BEG centres that are full members are represented. It is a real forum where results are presented, proposals are made and specific assignments are completed.

The management committee was set up for the first time in 2003 and it functions as a permanent management body. It is comprised of 9 BEG centres and is responsible for the catalogue administration. It has a rotating membership every two years.

The working groups began in 2006. They are small groups, voluntary, and open to the participation of librarians. Today there are 8 working groups devoted to the following areas:

- Quality and marketing: - studies the indicators and works in the creation of a BEG trade;
- Training and e-learning: - proposes and organizes courses and workshops in a classroom setting, and virtual training courses addressed to the professionals in the network;

- E-information: - makes and proposes joint actions to keep, manage and diffuse electronic serials, and also to create a common digital repository for the whole network;
- Indexing: - provides guidelines for document treatment, useful for all cataloguers in the network;
- Loans: - analyzes and proposes unified action guidelines that make loan management easy for end users as in interlibrary loan;
- Serials: - studies joint policies for the acquisition, management, conservation and dissemination of serials;
- Professional reality: - analyzes and assesses the professional situation of people in the network and the professional situation in the government.
- Web/intranet - is devoted to the web, OPAC and intranet improvement.

The Web/Intranet working group was created with the objective of providing a shared virtual working space for all the BEG. The intranet structure in the Catalan administration follows the Generalitat hierarchical organization. It is organized according to the "Departments" and there were no cross departmental projects that allowed institutions which were dependent on multiple departments to work jointly. In this situation, the working group Web/Intranet studied the possibilities and obtained the support of the government for creating a shared portal in the e-Catalunya platform.

The e-Catalunya Platform

E-Catalunya Platform is an initiative of the Generalitat de Catalunya to facilitate communication, cooperative work and knowledge sharing among citizens. The last objective is to contribute to the development of a knowledge society in Catalunya. E-Catalunya is a platform of social networks (discussion areas, collaborative work, knowledge management) that have been created and managed by members of groups that need to interchange knowledge and experience.

Each community interacts in its own portal --that can be of public access or restricted (only for registered members), through participating tools like blogs, forums, file repositories, wikis, calendars, etc. Portals also have tools (mailing lists, RSS, automatic alerts, etc.) to facilitate communication between members of the group. Participants of each portal have a personal space to define their profile, insert a photo, and keep documents and a personal blog.

Members of a portal can contribute with tools, answer and comment contributions from others, load and download files, edit common documents, send emails to a group or to a community at the same time, etc. Each portal has administrators and moderators to encourage participation and to organize knowledge.

XBEG Portal

The working group Web/Intranet organized the content of the XBEG portal, and is responsible for its administration. It's structured in a common working area for people

of BEG and in different groups of restricted access for members of task groups or people with special interests.

It is not a public portal, but it is restricted to registered members. To have access, it is necessary that administrators authorize new members.

Portal language is Catalan, both for the system and for the content.

The working spaces are:

XBEG Common Area

All members of the BEG portal can go in and it is the vehicle to share information and documentation. All tools except for one have been activated and each of them has a specific function:

- Blogs - there are two active blogs: *News XBEG* and *Resources XBEG*. The first one gives notice of news and publications which are of general interest. In the second, libraries publish lists of duplicate or low interest documents, in case any member library might be interested in acquiring them.
- Calendar *XBEG Agenda*. - Call for courses, meetings, assemblies and other activities are shown. It allows online registration to all people interested in participating.
- Photo album *XBEG Images* - It keeps pictures of the network activities: meetings, task groups, training, etc.
- File repository *XBEG Documents* - it keeps documentation produced by the network activity, like meeting minutes, proceedings, guidelines, etc. There are also copies of external documents that affect the BEG network directly, like library statistics or legal norms.
- Wiki *BEG directory* - List with names of contact people, addresses, emails, links to web and intranet pages of all BEG. It is kept up-to-date so everybody has always the most recent information.
- Forum *XBEG Forum* - Discussion web tool, with 19 discussion lines working.
- Mailing list.

The tool that is not active is the mailroom or participative process. It is a tool of online surveys, which has been tested by only one of the groups.

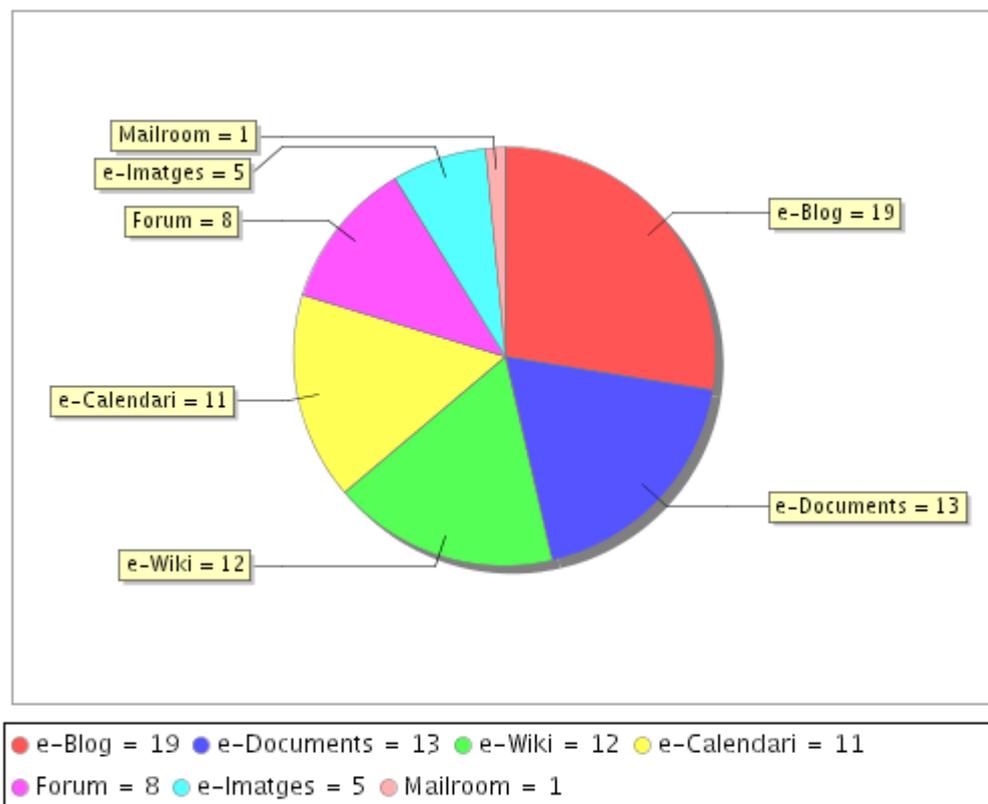
Working areas according to shared interests

- *Administrators*: Restricted access to designers and responsible for portal administration and to share and solve technical problems.
- *BEG integrated in CUCC*: Restricted access to the 13 libraries that participate in the Catàleg Col·lectiu de les Universitats de Catalunya.
- *Management Committee 2006/2007*: Common area for the 9 BEG that became part of the Management Committee 2006/2007. It is not active anymore, but it keeps its documentation.
- *Management Committee 2008/2009*: Common area for the valid management committee.

Specific areas for task groups:

E-Information
GRUFO (Working group of Training and E-Learning)
Indexing
Loans
Serials
Quality and marketing
Professional reality
Web/Intranet

Used tools:



Distribution of tools is as follows:

ÀREA	Blog	Calendar	File repository	Forum	Mailroom	Photo album	Wiki
XBEG	2	1	1	1	0	1	1
Admin.	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
BEG/CCUC	1	1	1	1	0	0	1
CG 06/07	1	1	1	1	0	1	2
CG 08/09	1	1	1	0	0	0	1
E-Informació	1	1	1	0	0	0	1
GRUFO	1	1	1	1	0	0	0

Indexació	2	1	1	0	0	0	2
Préstec	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
P.Periòdiques	1	1	1	1	0	1	0
Qualitat i M.	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Realitat profes.	6	1	1	0	0	0	0
Web/Intranet	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
Total	19	11	13	8	1	5	12

Each working group has designed its area according to its needs. Some only use file repository and a novelties blog. There are others that use almost all tools. Dynamics of each group determines the way they take profit of the tools they have.

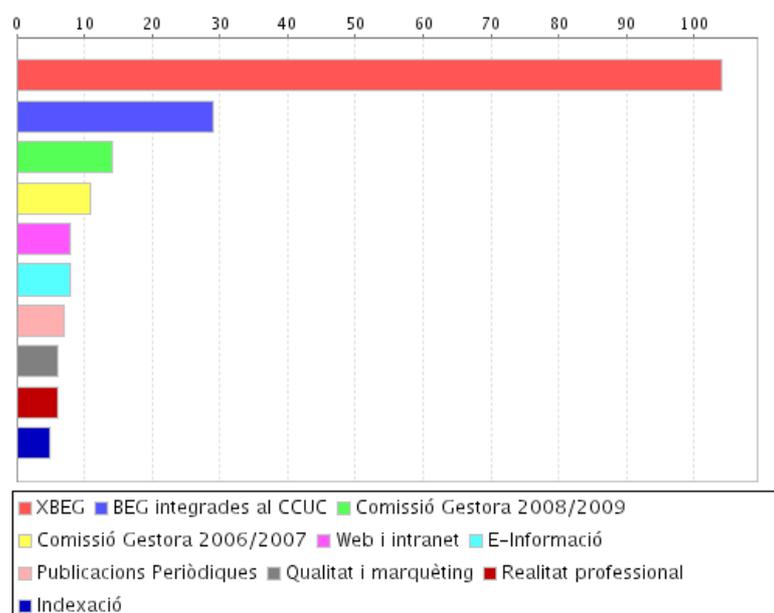
Usage statistics

XBEG Portal began functioning in January 2007. During that month training was given and it was operative in February. After two years of operation the most relevant statistics are:

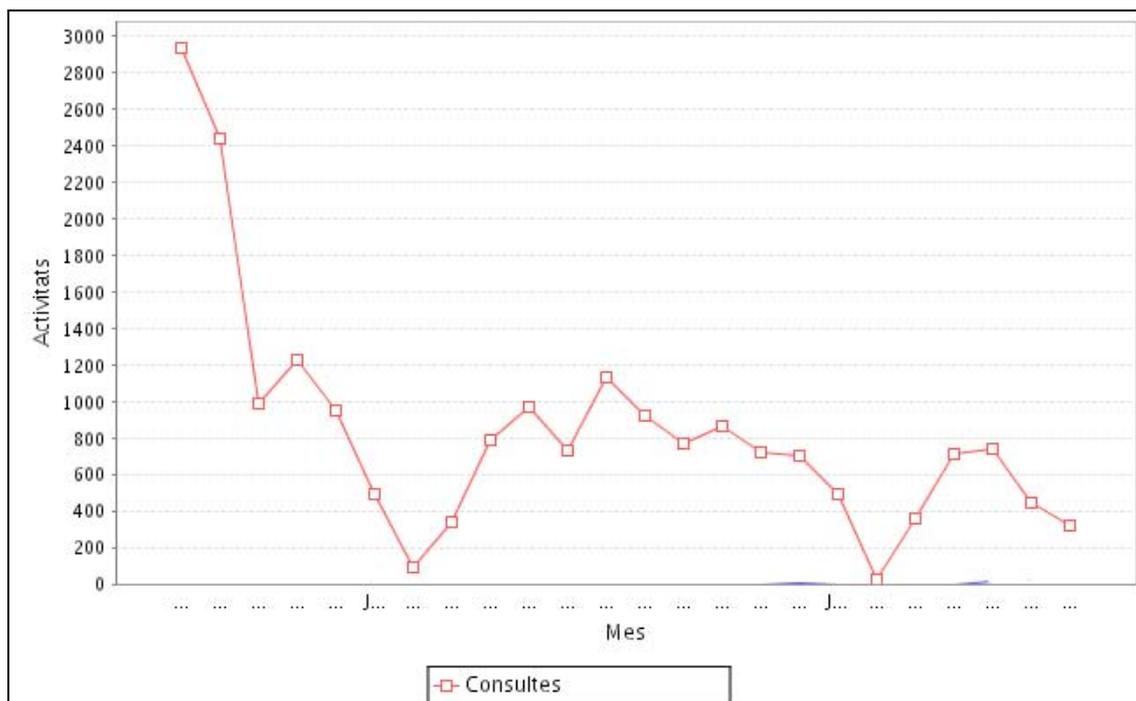
Authorized people:

- Active: 104
- Total: 121
- People that have consulted the Portal: 121

Authorized people for each working area:



Total consults 1-2-2007/31-1-2009: 20164

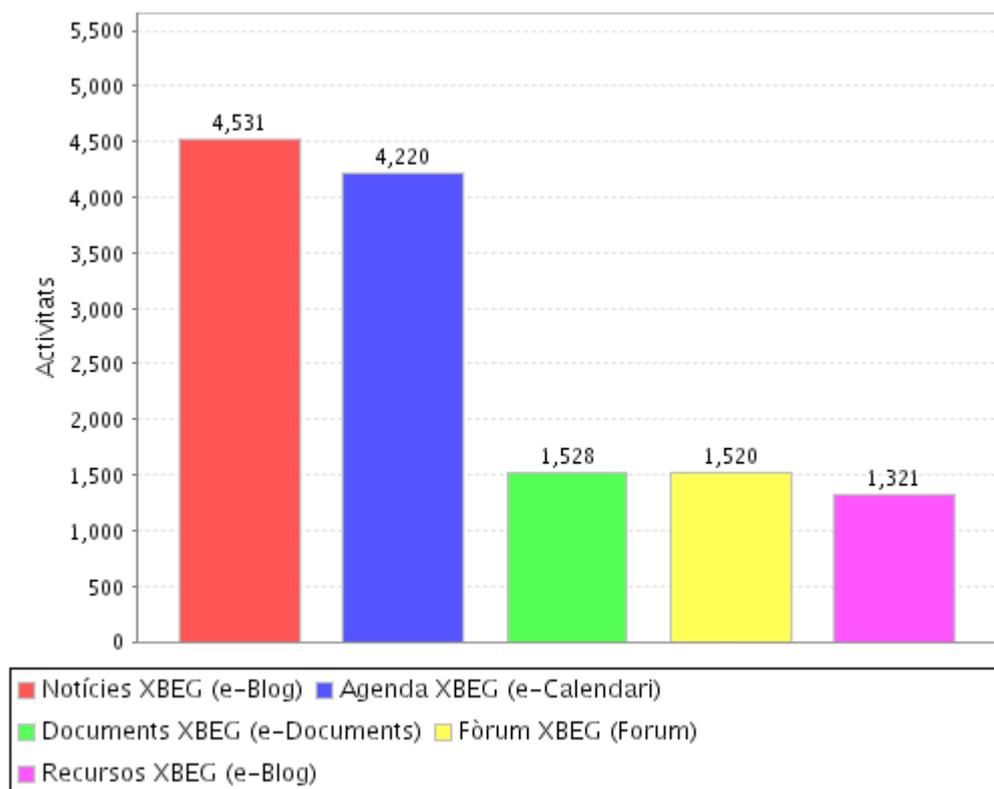


Contributions for type of tool:

	Number	Portal participation	XBEG participation	area	Total persons	Comments
Blog	19	204 posts	79 posts		23	74
Calendar	11	--	--		--	--
File repository "e-documents"	13	264 files	94 files		24	--
Forum	8	37 discussions	27 discussions		43	67
Mailroom	1	3 participations	--		3	--
Photo album	5	35 photos	9 photos		5	--
Wiki	12	103 revisions	60 revisions		37	--
Total	69	643	269		31	141

In data *Total persons* only one occurrence per person has been kept, although it is counted as a participant in more than a tool.

Tools with higher activity:



Assessment of statistical data

All authorized people have consulted the portal at some point. All of them can access XBEG area, the common working area for all members. Withdrawals and changes in the different staffs indicate that 17 authorized people are no longer active in the portal.

The distribution by month of the consultation shows a sharp peak of activity in the first two months of operation of the portal. This is the initial phase of euphoria, the process of discovering a novelty. The decrease of consultations in July and September, and its virtual disappearance in August corresponds to holiday periods. The number of consultations in the other months ranges between 300 and 1200. It coincides with the time the task force Web/Intranet suspended its activities, during which the portal was revitalized. Between one-third to one-half of all contributions to the various tools belong to the XBEG area. It is the one area which has more participants and more areas of interest, so it is logical that it is the most dynamic.

Of the 121 participants in the portal in these two years, only 31 have provided content. It represents 25.6% of the total. Interpreting this data is complex. There is a theory that in Web 2.0, for every 100 people approximately one creates content, 10 participate and 89 look¹. In this case, we can consider that the contribution of content for one of every four people is a success of participation.

¹ "if you get a group of 100 people online then one will create content, 10 will "interact" with it (commenting or offering improvements) and the other 89 will just view it." ARTHUR, Charles. "What's the 1% rule?" *The Guardian*, Thursday 20 July 2006.

However, lack of comments in blogs and the failure to follow the threads of discussion in the forums has only one possible interpretation, and it is a negative one. The effort to create content (the blog article, start a forum thread) is already done, but it has no continuity among those who should only leave their opinion.

Most of the contributions to the XBEG area are performed by the administrators of the Portal, who seek to keep up-to-date information from news, the calendar of activities and are responsible for feeding the document repository. In the areas of each working group, these papers are the responsibility of the leader of each group. The result is that there are people with a high level of content creation in areas of working groups, but who do not take part in the area XBEG.

Finally, the tools with higher activity, both in content contribution as well as in consultations are those belonging to the area XBEG, for the reasons already stated.

Some of the challenges to develop and revitalize the portal XBEG identified in the process of collecting data are:

- Lack of culture in the use of social networking tools: prejudice against forums, wiki, etc. The idea that an intranet is a repository of final documentation is deep-seated. Some people do not use it as a means of communication and work, but they only consult the contents that already exist.
- By shyness and lack of habit to work with social networks, there is some prejudice against identifying oneself with a picture or by completing the personal profile.
- Habit of working with e-mail: It is difficult to change the habit and get used to consult the portal to know the news, make contacts and work on shared documents.
- Too many virtual environments for consultation and work: Web of BEG, departmental intranets, intranet of the Generalitat, webs of each department or agency, distribution lists of professionals, association websites, social networks, blogs. There are too many communication channels. It may lack clarity on the value and objectives of the portal and its proper use.

The level of user satisfaction is high. The portal fulfils its function and, in fact, according to some opinions, provides tools that go beyond those required for an intranet. People who have this view are those that do not provide content. There seems to be a gap between the technical possibilities of Web 2.0 tools and the preparation of the user community.

Conclusions

The advantages of working in a portal that includes social networking tools are evident. The XBEG Portal facilitates communication among a group that has the habit of working independently, but more and more needs to communicate with each other and develop and implement common procedures. The use of Web 2.0 in a professional environment facilitates communication, exchange, cooperation and shared work. It allows the

cohesion of a professional network through restricted access and the identification and organization of the contents of each type of tool. The intranet facilitates working in a network, and this improves the results not only within the profession, but also in the final offer of services and accessibility of information to the user community.

E-Catalunya platform has proven to be a good option to develop a cross intranet within the Administration:

- It is a platform designed to serve social and civic networks, without publicity or profit.
- It is flexible and allows assigning new tools to any area of the website immediately.
- No maintenance or development costs for the user.
- The initial cost of development and training of the administrators of the group was taken by the Administration.
- It allows proper organization of content within each group, as required.
- Technically is under constant development and updating

Obviously, it is not perfect. There is a clear improvable aspect, that has been treated from the beginning: the service of automatic alerts of news which is not fully reliable, since it does not always advise of novelties in the portal.

Platform E-Catalunya has a feature that is somewhat disappointing for the administration of each portal: it is not aesthetically customizable. It is not possible to determine the distribution of data on screen or the font, or to create a header with the logo of the portal, etc. This prevents the intranet from sharing the corporate image that can be established on the site, in print and in other publications of the network.

The forecast of the future for the XBEG Portal includes to plan the incorporation to the BEG network of other libraries and documentation centres that are also dependent on the Generalitat de Catalunya. There are about 75 that are not part of the network nor the catalogue and some, if not most, are candidates to join and expand the network and thus to promote shared, collaborative work, the establishment of common procedures, and the resolution of problems affecting all sites that rely on the Administration of the Generalitat. With their inclusion the figure of 300 users on the network would be achieved. This is an action promoted by the Subdirecció General de Biblioteques, for providing the access to this collaborative tool to all the government libraries.

BEG network has no hierarchical structure. Therefore, the best way of working collaboratively is to use tools of free and interactive participation, where all views have a place and to facilitate knowledge sharing. Web 2.0 tools for a 2.0 network, that will ensure that the intranet is not limited to being, like many others, a mere substitute for the board. The portal administrators have the responsibility to make the XBEG portal easy to use, and take advantage of the social network tools to improve collaboration between the BEG members. Following this trend, the administrators attended some professional meetings for e.Catalunya portal administrators. In these meetings, they exchanged information and experiences about motivational activities and strategies. To achieve an increase of contents, administration of the portal should encourage the use of different tools. To facilitate a change in the attitude among some in the group who continue using email to share knowledge or who have problems with the notion of

publishing content on the intranet, it is necessary that the most active elements in the portal involve the rest in different information measures. Training activities in a virtual environment are being designed, which will serve as a practice for using different tools.

Participants in the XBEG portal have to face up to the challenge of establishing new strategies of revitalization to facilitate the active participation and contribution of content for the entire professional group. Strategies must consider the need for continuous training of professionals taking into account the emergence of new technological tools.

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