Google Wave: Have CTSI-minded institutions caught it?

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Good afternoon! Thank you to Jon for the introduction and many thanks to all those involved for organizing an excellent conference! I’m honored to be here. My name is Amy Donahue, and (as mentioned?) I’m one of the National Library of Medicine Associate Fellows, currently in my 2nd year at the University of Minnesota’s Bio-Medical Library.
I'll go over my outline quickly: I'm going to go over some background regarding what Wave actually is and why one might care about it and then move into the case report itself. And we should have time for some questions at the end.

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Background – What is Wave?

- Wave: a new communication and collaboration tool
- Limited release of “preview” on 09/30/09
- How you use it:
  - Create “waves” with “wavelets” and “blips”
  - Add extensions (gadgets and bots)
  - Tag waves
  - Invite specific people or make it public
  - Watch the playback

Background:

Wave should basically be considered a new communication tool with an emphasis on collaboration. It combines e-mail, chat, and social networking with other capabilities to create something new.

It was released to a select group of more than 100,000 people on September 30, 2009. Since the initial release, many more invitations have been given out, and the number of users on Wave has grown substantially. However, Wave is currently still in preview.

This is a quick explanation of how it actually works, with some vocabulary that will be helpful as I continue:
- The main component of Google Wave are its “waves” (note the lowercase), which are basically blank canvases for text and embedded objects like videos, pictures, or documents. Within a wave, a “wavelet” is a major topic or point in a wave, and a “blip” is a reply within a wavelet,
- Extensions can be incorporated into waves for additional functionality: “gadgets” are small applications that add interactive content to a wave, and “bots” are automated robots that execute commands within a wave. An example might be a gadget that inserts a map into a wave or a bot that returns citations from PMID numbers.
- You can tag waves, just as in Flickr or Delicious, with keywords.
- Once you’ve started a wave, you can make it private and only invite specific people to participate, or make it a “public” wave that can be found and joined by
A few final important background details:

Wave was designed to help solve some of e-mail’s big problems. For example, the issue of multiple replies. If I send you an e-mail, and you reply back but add a person, that means that there are 3 copies of that message out there, 5 if anyone replies all, and so on. Wave creates a space with only 1 version that allows for the playback I mentioned before.

Another very important aspect of Wave is the fact that Google has indicated that the Wave protocol will be federated and made available for any server. That means any institution can host a Wave protocol for its own use that will be able to talk to other Wave servers, in the same way that different e-mail servers are able to talk to one another currently.

For more information on everything I just went over for the background, I highly recommend taking a look at the Complete Google Wave Guide, which goes into further detail on Wave’s capabilities and vocabulary.
Now that I’ve gone over a little about what Google Wave is and how it works, I’ll give a few reasons why we might be interested in it.

Librarians and information professionals currently teach, use, and evaluate numerous tools in our interdisciplinary settings. At the University of Minnesota, for example, we do this with everything from RefWorks to OvidMedline to Google Docs, teaching our users about them, using them to increase our own productivity, and making decisions about what to recommend to our users. Google Wave is simply another tool to add to this list.

In addition, Wave may have direct appeal to CTSI-minded institutions specifically, given its promise as an interdisciplinary collaboration tool and a potential for new authorship models.

These models, like real-time collaboration across institutions and disciplines in large numbers using shared resources raise concerns where librarians and information professionals have areas of expertise, including those of copyright (as the panel this morning addressed), scholarly communication in general, attribution and authority control for authors, and future accessibility and preservation (related to institutional repositories),
-The background I just gave was an attempt to demonstrate the potential for Google Wave use in CTSI realm and at describing information professionals’ potential roles. However, “potential” does not itself always translate into real life usage (or usefulness). In order to explore stakeholders’ actual use and thoughts on Google Wave, it became necessary to collect some evidence. Given that Google Wave is still in preview/development, and has not been widely adopted, using a case study perspective was determined to be the best starting point.
The targeted population for this study focused on people in the US with some affiliation with a CTSA-minded institution, including support staff, researchers, and librarians.

However, there was some potential for members of the general public to become involved.
Methods

- Participant recruitment:
  - Public waves
  - Twitter, LinkedIn, I Health Informatics forum, blogs
  - CTSA Communications Key Function Committee
- Survey and discussion
  - Survey: public wave
  - Discussion: private wave (collaboration/authorship test case)
- Officially ended 2/19/10
  - waves still up, both open to the public.

For the methods section, I’m going to explain both how I recruited participants and what I had those participants actually do.

-First, individuals from CTSA-minded institutions were solicited from other public waves on related topics such as research collaboration, scholarly communication, health technology, medical informatics and so on. I basically posted what I was doing with a direct link to my survey wave. Because this recruitment was all done publicly, it would be possible for members of the general public to participate.
- Additionally, “calls” for participants went through all other avenues I could think of and which were suggested to me, including Twitter, an online health informatics forum, and a guest post on a CTSA-affiliated medical librarian’s blog. Attempts were also made to contact the CTSA Communications Key Function Committee, but were not successful.

-My methods for exploring the potential of Wave for CTSIs were to use qualitative survey and discussion tools. Basically, two waves were created 1 for the survey and 1 for the discussion. The first wave is public and consists of several brief survey questions (using a polling gadget created specifically for Wave) designed to collect demographic data on the respondents’ roles, if and what specific features might be useful, and who the respondents might collaborate with using Wave. The second wave was to be a private, guided discussion on Wave’s collaboration potential where I attempted to actually collaborate. I proposed that anyone who contributed to the discussion wave would have the option of being considered an author on this presentation. In other words, creating a formal test case on the collaboration potential itself.

Formal data collection on the two waves ended on Friday, February 19th, 2010. However, the waves will remain open indefinitely, to provide a living place for
- By February 19th, eight individuals had joined the public survey wave in addition to the author. These individuals did not each answer all the survey questions, but each question had at least one response. Although only one of the 8 specifically mentioned interest in participating in the discussion, I invited all eight participants to the private wave. Unfortunately, there was no participation.

- The survey results are on the next slide:
I’ll just point out a couple of key points; I apologize if this is hard to read (there’s no good way to capture the scrolling waves with screenshots)!

First of all, only 1 of the 8 indicated that Wave had no potential, but that one individual did also answer other questions about what in Wave might be useful.

Most of the participants were librarians.

There were votes for both the gadgets/bots that I had suggested, and participants indicated that they would collaborate with others (including librarians, but librarians were the majority of respondents), including people outside of their home institution. Project managers received one less than the other groups, for some reason!

For the potential uses, overall there were more votes for the collaboration-focused options (like collaborating on papers) over the communication-focused options (asking questions).

For the first question, could Wave be useful for CTSIs, the majority (n=5) indicated maybe. Two people indicated yes, and one participant chose no. Of the seven who responded to the question of "who are you," 4 indicated librarian, 2 were CTSI...
So, in conclusion, the small result set of this study implies that Google Wave is not on the forefront of CTSI communication, and there is simply a lack of evidence to say that either Wave will be useful or it won’t be.

-So the question remains a maybe: Wave is being used, and it does provide new collaboration and authorship capabilities; being aware of these abilities may be useful to information professionals serving CTSIs if a need for these abilities becomes apparent and options are needed. Also, while the number of respondents was very small, the results may be worth considering if, say, your CTSI wants to know what Wave might be good for (if it’s brought in on its own server)—there is preliminary support for using it as a way to collaborate (over just communication) for example.
Conclusions cont.

- Lessons learned
  - Testing a beta tool
  - Privacy concerns?
  - Authorship concerns?
  - Identifying communication channels

- Despite the lack of evidence for the main question, the project itself yielded some valuable lessons learned.

- First, the considerations around testing a new beta tool. Wave is not only is it a new tool, it is a tool that is not yet available to everyone and which does not have desired functionality (a notification system for new wave updates, for example) and that often runs slowly and/or crashes. Expectations about testing tools at this stage, regardless of hype, should take these factors into consideration.

- Specific to Wave in this case, another issue may have been the current lack of privacy, although it was not mentioned directly by the participants. But it is fairly apparent who responded in what way to the poll questions, and every blip has clear authorship, making Wave more of a place to have an asynchronous focus group rather than to post an actual survey. In addition, Google’s terms and conditions imply that Google has the right to use anything posted in Wave, public or private; this is a major deterrent for researchers (although this would not be an issue on an institution-hosted server).

- The other side of the privacy problem is a lack of authority control; although likely not an issue for this study, it would be possible for someone with a pseudonym Wave address to participate and give false information.

- Perhaps the biggest lesson I learned was about communication channels; I assumed that I could reach my target participants through the tool I was using, which was hindered by a lack of notifications (people had stopped coming to the
But I would like to end my presentation on a more positive conclusion, and that is the value of using a case study as an evaluation tool for a new technology.

- The cost in terms of time was relatively low
- I personally enjoyed the fact that knowledge was gained on how to use the technology itself. I can now offer some level of expertise on Wave should questions about its use arise.
- Finally, it does establish a base level of evidence to potentially build on in the future.

Basically, the groundwork for the project was done by a single person over the course of less than three months and resulted in knowledge gained and a starting point for further work; a similar undertaking may be a useful strategy for a lone CTSI liaison attempting to gather some evidence on the use and potential of a new tool (an open-access platform or institutional repository, for instance).
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  - in http://www.flickr.com/photos/ultimatelibrarian/galleries/72157623424556865/

Special thanks to the medical librarians (especially Nikki Detmar) on Twitter and Wave for their encouragement and support.
Now I think we have some time for questions. Although I’m actually going to leave this slide to put up instructions for joining the waves mentioned in this presentation if anyone’s interested.
I apologize for the long link; I’m hoping to be able to post these slides somewhere where they can actually be clicked instead of needing to copy it all down.