Back Talk -- CD in Digital Era CALIS

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Everyone around the world on a similar level and offers so many ways customers, is one of the most inspiring things about the site — it puts between designers and knitters/crocheters, or shop owners and their had already knit my designs — I never would have known or seen the amazing, for me, to join back in May 2007 and see that other users with people who were knitting designs. Says centered on her design portfolio and the way it allowed her connect with people who were knitting and crocheting, but on professional topics as well.

The Ravelibrarians, for example, have their own special place on Ravelry, in the Ravelibrarians group (Figure 4). There, job announcements are posted, questions about library school programs are asked and answered, and librarians often consult with each other on professional issues. Just recently someone posted asking for ideas and assistance on cataloging a vintage knitting collection, and received feedback and suggestions about how to get started.

“Even if someone is not very active in terms of contributing to the discussion, there is still an incredible amount of information to read. It’s like having your own personal knitting staff available 24/7/365 to answer questions, make suggestions, or offer feedback,” says Jensen. In the case of the Ravelibrarians, Ravelry users consult not just on issues of knitting and crocheting, but on professional topics as well.

Prior to working for Ravelry, Cogar’s favorite features of Ravelry centered on her design portfolio and the way it allowed her connect with people who were knitting designs. Says Cogar, “It was pretty amazing, for me, to join back in May 2007 and see that other users had already knit my designs — I never would have known or seen the projects they made from my patterns if it wasn’t for Ravelry.” Cogar went on to say that “Ravelry allows such a great means for connection between designers and knitters/crocheters, or shop owners and their customers, is one of the most inspiring things about the site — it puts everyone around the world on a similar level and offers so many ways to communicate.”

As an online community, one of the significant differences between Ravelry and social networking Websites like MySpace or Facebook is that on MySpace or Facebook users are primarily looking to make connections with people they know in their off-line lives, while on Ravelry users are primarily looking to connect with people with common interests, not people they already know.

Ravelry allows people who have a common interest (knitting, crocheting, and other fiber arts) to connect with each other and explore other common interests, whether it is librarianship, insects, or Buffy the Vampire Slayer. “I firmly believe that Ravelry is the 21st century answer to ‘bridge night’ or other social networking institutions of the last century,” says Ravelry user Elizabeth Trzebiatowski, a stay-at-home mom in Stevens Point, Wisconsin. Trzebiatowski went on to explain, “People are busier in general than they were then, but Ravelry provides an outlet for people with similar interests (and subsets of interests, as evidenced by the massive number of individual groups devoted to wildly divergent topics) to gather and converse and share… Where else can so many people with a shared interest in, say, cephalopods and entrelac join together and chat about it?” [For the non-knitterly, entrelac is a particular knitting technique.]

Where else, indeed?

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mine for free materials. Doing Google searches for specific topics also reveals scores of wonderful databases which are free for the picking.

Our goal has always been to make it easy for readers to find the information they need; and in the past we bought as many books and journals as possible to increase the chances that we had already acquired what they wanted before our students and faculty members entered the door. This is still the same but we now have Web resources to help us meet our goal. Because of the Web, we work more conscriptly than in the past. Collection Development in the print and digital ages has one more thing in common: You didn’t have enough money then, and you don’t have enough now!!

Mary-Heather Cogar
this past week I attended the 10th An-
iversary celebration of the founding of CALIS (China Academic Libraries Information System). It is sort of a cross between a SOLINET (http://www.solinet.net) and OCLC (http://www.oclc.org/ks/en/default.htm) in that it clearly sees its role to be one of total “no holds barred” advocacy for its member libraries by purchasing content in their behalf, by negotiating shared licenses, and by operating a shared cataloging bibliographic utility. During my attendance at the meeting I was struck with a sense of the break-neck gallop into the digital era that these libraries have been experiencing since China decided to become a major actor on the world’s stage. Thirty years ago when I went as a member of the Committee on East Asian Libraries delegation to China, college and university libraries were largely unattended academic dustbins. Now scores and scores of them are bright, shiny, and rapidly growing with legions of young and ambitious librarians.

I was asked to talk about university library collection development in the digital environment and to say something of the situation in Hong Kong. It occurred to me that most of the basic functions performed by collection developers were the same: we need to understand user needs, what our collections already have to meet those needs, what relevant material is being published, and then to select as much of what is good as our pocketbooks will allow.

Such talk is comforting, but of course I also had to talk about the environment in which we continue to shuffle our CD deck chairs around is completely different: unlike in the past when our patrons would fairly quickly come to gauge for us the importance of our services and collections and to tell us how well we are doing. This enables us to conduct a “gap analysis” and to develop a list of the areas of most importance to our readers where we need to improve. For undergraduates, the most consistent gap over the past six years has been the “lack of sufficient books in my field.” While we always did surveys in the past, the Web makes this job much easier. We now have a group studying this issue more carefully: is the problem the lack of duplicates, the lack of unique titles, or the lack of English or Chinese language materials? I also illustrated how we use e-journal and eBook vendor reports, proxy server use statistical reports developed by our system’s office and OPAC circulation statistics to better understand the needs of our readers.

Collection analysis services of the type provided by OCLC’s WorldCat Collection Analysis Service or Library Dynamics’s Spectra Dimension were also discussed. While collection analysis tools like these have been around for several years in North America, having such services easily available in China have yet to become a reality. Many were interested in being able to compare one library’s holdings with those at other libraries and to be able to print out lists of books which others had for significant areas of interest.

Certainly another area where collection development work is very different in the electronic era, from how it was in the print world, relates to the amount of consortial purchasing going on. I remember well, as a new selector in the 1970’s, spending hours supplementing approval plans by going through tall piles of publisher brochures and exclusion slips deciding a “yes” or a “no” for each purchase decision. Part of the fun was being able to make independent decisions on what to buy. Now, with our own library spending 62 percent of its library materials budget on electronic materials, Jenny Lai our E-resources Coordinator has to spend a lot of time meeting or communicating with her colleagues before decisions are made. We estimate we saved about US$3.5 million dollars last year through consortial purchasing (we also buy North American and British monographs together).

A final area of difference discussed is the importance of “mining the Web” for freebies. In the old days gift and exchange materials composited a very small part of the books which we added to the academic libraries where I worked. I foresee this changing significantly in the future. Of course linking to books relevant to local needs in the Google Book Search system is the obvious place to look for out-of-print books to supplement current purchases. For example, we have a significant interest in books about China. When I did a Google Book Search for “China” I found 188,600 entries with 4,313 available to downloading. Of course a selector will have to sort out the books about chinaware dishes, but this is a simple illustration of what is possible. If you haven’t looked at Bookyards: library to the world (http://www.bookyards.com/) you should take a look at another example of where to

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