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ATG Interviews Dona Straley

Meris Mandernach

*James Madison University, manderna@jmu.edu*

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ATG: A faculty colleague of mine remarked that academic e-journals and ebooks were one way or another pdf platforms. I was about to argue when it dawned on me he had a point. We run predictable technology. Can we do more? Should we?

AO: There are lots of PDF’s out there, but I think your colleague is too pessimistic. There are more and more publications using non-fixed formats, interactive, media. It’s inevitable there will be many more and better. And PDF, remember, is a clunky, unusable format for handhelds and even cute little netbooks. Give it 20 years and we’ll remember PDF the way we remember 5 ½ inch floppy disks.

New technologies give new opportunities to libraries, opportunities that we are beginning to seize. Librarians are becoming more in touch with users and less preoccupied with the exact types of objects we collect. These are very exciting times to be in our profession. The other day, I was describing to one of my medical specialists an international digital library project we at Yale are working on and also an upcoming UN project meeting. He said, “Sounds like I should have been a librarian instead — compared to you all, we’re like wallpaper.” I meet people on planes who can’t stop talking about Google settlements, online information, rare maps, how great their public library is, and asking me what I think about these things, as they get out their Kindles to read books — instead of watching the airline movie. Who would have thought it?!