Chameleons in our Midst: How Scholarly and Professional Roles are Changing Due to Technology

Deborah Vaughn  
College of Charleston, vaughnd@cofc.edu

Ana Arias Terry  
Informed Strategies, ana.terry@informedstrategies.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Recommended Citation

Vaughn, Deborah and Terry, Ana Arias (2001) "Chameleons in our Midst: How Scholarly and Professional Roles are Changing Due to Technology," Against the Grain: Vol. 13: Iss. 2, Article 8.  
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3448

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.
Chameleons in our Midst: How Scholarly and Professional Roles are Changing Due to Technology

by Ana Arias Terry (Vice President, Informed Strategies, 633 S. College Ave., Suite F, Fort Collins, CO 80524; Phone: 970-472-5985, Fax: 970-490-5982)  
<ana.terry@informedstrategies.com>

Business activities in the academic and professional arena are not efforts that fall in the "as usual" category -- at least not since technology has been making more frequent and permanent marks into the very infrastructure of our industry. What are some of the most challenging changes organizations have had to adapt to because of technological developments? Looking at the other side of the coin, what are the most interesting opportunities these organizations have before them?

Overview

While higher education publishing circles have hardly been the epicenters of speedy and innovative technological advancements, little doubt remains that technology has been slowly but surely taking a hold in scholarly publishing. It seems little things can mean a lot after all. Email has become part of our everyday communication processes with colleagues, customers, vendors, and competitors. URLs are as commonplace on our business cards as they are on the sides of UPS trucks. Web-based discussion forums, chats, listserfs, and online-only publications are somewhat perceived as routine.

Almost every player in this industry has been affected by the way technology has been evolving. More vendors have figured out how to make screen presentations of mathematical symbols easier for our eyes. More publishers, particularly small to medium size ones, seem more willing to join forces with technology partners who can help them make the transition of their journals and books online, thanks at least in part to more robust security measures.

Librarians are finding themselves adapting, constantly, to the way they operate from placing orders to providing material to end-users. Authors and editors continue to make the transition to all electronic submissions and peer reviewing tools that require a shift in their submission and editing approaches. Authors, at times have a different interpretation of "short submission to publication" cycles, and expect to see their manuscripts published in a few weeks' time to a month. Some association publishers are "losing" sound articles to other journals because of a perceived "slow" production cycle in these electronic times.

End-users, happy to embrace the benefits that have resulted from innovations that enable them to access information faster and easier, continue to want more. With more information available to them at desktops, one of the questions looming in the industry is their assessment of what constitutes quality information vis-à-vis access and speed of delivery.

From the Field

CatchWord, which started off as a technology organization, finds that some of the very challenges it has had to adapt to in this area are becoming more pronounced as technology continues to evolve.

continued on page 28

Using the Automated OCLC/WLN from page 24

Our goal is to assess our entire collection within the next five years. When we complete this assessment, we plan to have the automated OCLC/WLN Conspexsus run again to compare our progress. As the automated software improves, perhaps a more comprehensive, less labor intensive product will be developed. Until then, collection development librarians will always have much work to do.

References

AMIGOS personnel informed me by telephone in May 1998 that they would not be converting their computer analysis program to a Windows version.


Endnotes

5. Slote (1997). On page xii of his preface, Slote describes the core collection and the weedeable part of the collection.

<http://www.against-the-grain.com>
Instead, *CatchWord* finds itself in the position of being able to make the publisher’s content available wherever the publisher wishes to see it, while building the necessary distribution business relationships on behalf of the publisher. “This is part of the value we add,” says Beckett, “which is much better understood and appreciated now than it was a year or two ago.”

But as we’ve seen, the changes emerging as a result of technology hardly end with vendors. It has equally infiltrated the librarian arena. According to Helene Williams, English Studies Librarian at the University of Washington Libraries, virtually every aspect of how libraries conduct business has changed. For one, libraries are: having to accept that owning resources isn’t possible all the time due to financial and space limitations. She adds that libraries are also being forced to accept that the provision of access regardless of format—be it subscription, databases, or document delivery—will in essence meet the needs of the user.

Williams believes that one of the ongoing challenges is the implementation costs associated with changes in technology. “Providing up-to-date hardware is not the only financial change: there’s the cost of software and content as well,” she says. “Libraries now must pay ongoing fees for electronic data which, in the print version, was often available for a one-time charge. The issue of duplication of information in multiple formats—and the complicated pricing structures—is also a challenge.”

She also points to the increased rate of change within libraries as another major challenge courtesy of technology. Formal training comes in handy, she says, but it’s not easy to provide or have time to attend and learn when there are so many changes in software, interfaces, and even printer parts.

But there is good news on the opportunities emerging as a result of these very technological developments. Thanks to technology, says Williams, there has been increased awareness and implementation of “just in time” practices vs. the more traditional “just in case” school of thought toward ownership of materials.

Williams points out that the automation of processes and access to resources on the Internet have encouraged greater collaboration between library units, such as between technical and public services, and amongst libraries, faculty, publishers, and end users. “The wired world has done much to highlight the librarian’s role on campus and in the community,” says Williams. “We often see and use the new technology before other groups, and we can provide training and mediation not available from the producer.”

The ability to reach the end user, whether on campus or remotely, says Williams, has been given a big boost by technology. The boundaries of time and geographic location are no longer obstacles. Whether the end user needs data from collections, instruction, or related services, it’s possible to provide these regardless of location. “Our interaction with distance education students is one obvious way we are taking advantage of the new wired world-without-walls,” she says. “An international example of collaboration is the Collaborative Digital Reference Service project (CDRS), spearheaded by the Library of Congress, which will provide value-added any time, anywhere reference service.”

With the advent of technology, particularly the development of the Web, ISI indicates that there are three areas that have presented the most challenging changes and required adaptation: content, customer service, and product enhancements.

Helen Atkins, director of Database Development for ISI, explains that in terms of content, ISI has expanded its already existing traditional sources of information, namely print journals, books, and proceedings, to Web-based content. They have offered e-journals (both born digitally and converted from print) for some time, and the primary challenges have been in revising and improving their internal systems to...
effectively manage diverse electronic source materials.

Beyond the more traditional journals, they've been working to identify, index, and provide access to scholarly Web sites through Current Contents Connect™. To make this work effectively, it required new editorial criteria and the addition of staff with the appropriate skills. Web of Science™ has been another development effort related to content expansion through Web links. They've worked out numerous arrangements with publishers to be able to link out from a Web of Science record to the corresponding full text article, for example. Some of the other linking arrangements they've worked on have included agreements with other publishers of databases, periodical directories, and patent information.

Atkins says that in the customer service arena, technology has enabled ISI to become more responsive to inquiries by customers, offer field training at customer locations internationally, and provide enhanced support activities through the Web regardless of international location or time zone. Additionally, ISI expects to offer product-training programs through the Web in the near future.

In terms of product enhancements, Atkins says being able to issue software and data updates through the Internet is a less cumbersome process than before. The distribution of various media—CD or disk as part of the updates—to thousands of customers worldwide was very costly. While developing the enhancements and upgrades to software remains highly time and labor intensive, says Atkins, the process of "distributing" such upgrades through the Web is less intense, allowing them to turn out software and data upgrades faster.

"The most interesting opportunity I see is that of increasing user autonomy, providing products that allow users to make choices," adds Atkins. "The fact that more and more resources that are complementary to ours are being provided on the Web means more opportunities for ISI to enter into partnerships."

Beckett sees two other challenging areas emerging, particularly in light of the technological implications. "The countervailing pressure to all transaction based delivery in the scholarly and academic market is the institutional move toward consortial purchasing," he says. "It seems clear to me, and I think there's evidence from OhioLINK and elsewhere, that large-scale deployment of a wide selection of content, freely available at the desktop, is likely to reduce the requirements from inside those institutions for transactional based delivery, whether it be ILL or pay-per-view," adds Beckett. His last observation on challenges sounds easier said than done. "Probably at the top of the list, which represents both a challenge and an opportunity," says Beckett, "is for companies to stay nimble and to keep their customers and their teams pumped up and focused."

References
4. See 1.

Chameleons

The advent of technology has for some time now permeated the way we conduct business today. It continues to influence our strategies for the future, whether the environment is a physical library, the desktop of a remote end user, a publishing house, or a vendor facility.

More than ever before, the roles we have traditionally played in the various organizational circles are in flux as we evaluate what we've done, what we need to adjust to today, and how best to prepare our institutions and interests for an exciting future where we're developing the models as we go. Fortunately, we work in an environment where thought and process are openly encouraged and expected, as is the exchange of ideas.

We must be willing to change and reconstruct our respective roles in productive ways that take advantage of the developments brought to us by technology. If we stay still amidst the change, we run the risk of organizational atrophy. If we thrash from one technological innovation to the next without having a solid foundation or a clear understanding of the implications of such actions, we run a similar risk. Indeed, the trick is learning to become like chameleons that adapt gradually to their new environments without bringing the inappropriate colors, or extra baggage, from before.