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Between the Stacks: The Emergence of a New Library Community

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Between the Stacks

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library science professionals all know that
the Internet is a powerful and easy way
to aggregate and disseminate information.
Oddly enough, I have tried for years to
locate a place on the Internet where members
of our field could congregate. I envisioned
a Website where all sorts of individuals could
freely come and go, ask questions and share
their work experiences. The site would be a casual
yet informative oasis where we could find support
from other library science professionals around
the world. Late one night in November 2002, unem-
ployed and needing a creative outlet, I decided to
take action and create what I could not find.

To my knowledge, Between the Stacks
(www.betweenthestacks.com) is the first online
discussion site created exclusively for library
and information science (LIS) professionals.
Containing a series of online forums where ev-
everyone from library students to library direc-
tors may gather, the site creates a common
ground for discussing issues, sharing ideas or
chatting with a fellow colleague. Still in its in-
fancy, the site is growing steadily with an inter-
national membership of nearly 200 registered
users to date.

In an attempt to be all-inclusive, forum topics
run the gamut and include specific areas for
academic libraries, public libraries, special li-
braries, government libraries, school libraries,
archives, medical libraries, competitive intelli-
gence, LIS students, LIS instructors and even a
place to post your job announcements. Discussion
areas also include off-topic sections such as
“Rant & Relax” where you can talk (i.e. vent)
about your workday or “The Book Nook” to
discuss a book you recently read.

You might be wondering, but what is a “fo-
rum”? Although a common form of online
discussion, it seems to be a newer concept for
members of our profession. We are familiar with
listservs and how they function, but the discus-
sion forum differs in some respects and pro-
vides a broader discussion platform. You sim-
ply visit the Website and review the threads of
discussion. Once you have registered, you may
post questions or join a thread of discussion.
New discussions occur everyday and site users
are finding that they check the forums each day
to participate in the latest discussions.

The discussion forum format allows you to
be selective in what you read. You go to it when
you have time, instead of having its contents
forced into your ever-groving inbox. Every-
thing is nicely categorized and you can quickly
view new posts since your last visit. My favor-
tie feature though is that forums allow for a
greater range of personal expression and anony-
umously if you so choose. You can express your
opinions freely without the fear that your col-
leagues will stone you during your lunch break.

Throughout college I utilized discussion forums for a variety of uses — for hobbies and personal interests. The site utilizes open
source software that is both powerful and easy
to use. Site functionality allows for seeing
who is online at any given time and the ability
to send personal messages between site members. All
content within forums is searchable and members may create profiles
about themselves, post pictures or even cre-
ate online polls.

From its initial conception, Between the
Stacks was up and running within only a few
days. For the past three years, I used my library
science skills in an information architecture role
to create a Web-based content management ap-
lication. Although I have worked in both aca-
demic and special libraries over the years, I drew
upon my non-traditional library science experi-
ence to technically build the site. In some ways
I have the dot-com bust to thank for Between the
Stacks finding life. My unemployment status gave
me the time and energy to create this service.

My initial goal of creating an online com-
unity for our profession has been met, but I
plan on continuing to foster the growth of Be-

Between the Stacks. In only a few short weeks, I
have received numerous emails from library profes-
sionals across the states commenting on the
forums. Everyone loves the idea of bringing stu-
dents, instructors, and LIS professionals together
in one setting.

The only obstacle for Between the Stacks
is the slight apprehension from library profes-
sionals in using the discussion forum medium.
I am not sure where the fear comes from, but I
would encourage site visitors to post on the fo-
rums and realize that it is a friendly and wel-
coming environment. There is nothing to fear
here. The forums are only what we are willing to make of them — the more that they are
used, the more robust and useful they will
become.

Collection Assessment...
from page 36

findings showing the comparative strength or
weakness of an individual collection are not
a report card or value judgment, nor are low
or high circulation rates bad or good. The
results are only to help us identify areas of the
collection that might go to our storage
facility, or areas in which some cooperative
purchasing might be appropriate. If age of
collection seems inappropriate in particular
subject areas or if low circulation rates are
seen as problematic, then let this cooperative
project try to address those issues.

So far the assessments done and the data
gathered are beginning to tell us some things
about the individual and consortial collections.
I hope that over the next year the librarians at
our four institutions will be able to continue to
examine the data to learn even more to help us
make decisions for cooperative collection build-
ing and management.

On the Road
from page 73

has been designated “Library Way,” and it is
being decorated with bronze plaques in the side-
walk honoring great authors. The Algonquin
Hotel is only a few blocks away, making this a
real literary Mecca.

Some of the other “library” amenities in-
clude a selection of international newspapers,
a video library of the American Film Institute’s
Top 100 films, and a complimentary breakfast
in the Reading Room with real New York bal-
gers. There is also a “Poetry Garden” with a
terrace and a “Writer’s Den” with a fireplace.
They are both open 24 hours a day, just for when
that bolt of inspiration hits you at 3 AM. The
terrace is surrounded by vistas of the neighbor-
ing parapets and cornices of the early twentith
century skyscrapers that surround the neighbor-
hood. Ziggurats and Greek temples and Moorish fantasys of the time tower all around.

These are the architectural fantasies that are in-
visible from the street, but which create a float-
ing work of their own. It’s easy to get carried
away in the Poetry Garden.

The Hotel was built as an office building in
1912. It is where Teddy Roosevelt worked on
Outlook Magazine. It was completely rede-
signed by Stephen B. Jacobs and decorated by
his wife Andi Pepper. The over 6,000 books in
the Hotel were all selected by the Strand Book-
store. Adele Gutman, Director of Sales and
marketing and “Honorary Librarian” tells me
that the books can be purchased at check out.

The atmosphere of the Library Hotel is an
island of tranquility in New York City. I would
highly recommend it for a thoughtful weekend
or as a quiet retreat during a business trip. It is
a great place to explore the joy of reading in the
heart of indomitable New York City.

The Library Hotel is at
299 Madison Avenue at 41st Street.
www.libraryhotel.com • 877-793-7323

<http://www.against-the-grain.com> 57