And They Were There -- Reports of Meetings -- ALCTS, InfoToday 2002, and MLA In Dallas

Janet L. Flowers

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, janet_flowers@unc.edu

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In the literature of library science there is much discussion of value-added information services. Both librarians and their clients have become concerned about the glut of information, asking how to eliminate needless and worthless data in the search for appropriate content. For library users, there are very real barriers to accessing, analyzing, and applying information, and librarians add value to information whenever they reduce the barriers to it. Value is added in easing the finding of the most appropriate, complete source of information, and in easing connections with information. Value is also added in easing the analysis and processing of information, and in facilitating its application. Consultants of all sorts know this well, and it is plain to see how much value our society places on providing hand-holding and turn-key solutions.

For all their concern with providing information access, giving good service to users, and adding value, librarians are hampered by the fact that information cannot yet be quantified and valued in any measurable way. Each element of information-handling requires its own accounting: acquiring information, presenting information, analyzing information, and so on. What is the relationship between the expense incurred in collecting information and the value of that information? This is a troublesome question for librarians. They must plan for the future, justifying increasing expenditures to their funding agencies, in the absence of a meaningful scheme to measure the value of information.

New metaphors for information

Stiglitz cites his 1976 and 1980 marketing studies done with Sanford J. Grossman. These studies showed that "if information is costly, there must be an equilibrium amount of disequilibrium—persistent discrepancies between prices and 'fundamental values' that provide incentives for individuals to obtain information." Stiglitz and Grossman concluded that "the only information that could be efficiently distributed was costless information." 

Does Stiglitz' reference to "costless information" imply that it is neither necessary nor possible to quantify information in terms of currency? Information is only one of many non-physical, non-material things we value. Do we need to measure it in dollar terms any more than we need to measure satisfaction that way, or self-expression, or self-fulfillment?

In the past, society's attempts to assign a dollar value to information and knowledge have had very uneven results. In academic life, a scholar's reputation depends on the perceived value of the knowledge she or he possesses. Society pays professionals such as doctors and lawyers highly for their expertise. Yet the stereotype of the impoverished artist or musician is based on a failure of the currency model when it comes to valuing ideas. At what stage or level do ideas and information become truly valuable to us? Is the satisfaction of merely possessing information sufficient in itself? Has the information economy become so fundamental to business and to our way of life that we must find a way to equate ideas with cash? Or, is an upheaval in our value system implied here, a need for a new foundation for commerce?

Librarians have long recognized the interrelated nature of knowledge, the many ways in which information produced in one discipline is integrated into another. Rather than finding analogies for valuing information in the fields of business, economics and accounting, information scientists should shape metaphors from other models. For example, information could be compared with the processes of metabolism:

- Information is always in circulation. It acts as the medium of exchange, the content of exchange, and the valuing mechanism of the exchange.
- Contradictions are evidence of being out of a stable state of equilibrium. They occur when the circulation of information is blocked.
- Information is disseminated, absorbed, and used in a way that can be likened to an organism's use of nutrients.
- Just as most chemical alterations occur at a cellular level, integration of information can take place only as an individual phenomenon.
- Information is integrated or compartmentalized at discrete levels, in a stepwise progression, just as energy levels within the molecule progress from lower energy to higher energy in discrete stages.
- Information is an inherent property of structure. Some information is stabilizing while some is destabilizing. Some destabilization is necessary to arrive at higher levels of integration and complexity.
- Higher levels of information, meaning greater integration of information, bring greater power, longer periods of stability, and wider vistas of understanding.

Money is a means of exchange, a way of measuring needs and wants, status and social expectations, scarcity and satiety, reputation and quality, usefulness and satisfaction, and so forth. However, the price system is an aggregate system. We cannot easily determine value at the individual level. It is obvious that price is rarely equivalent to intrinsic value. Perhaps value is, at root, a metaphysical construct. Is money the best surrogate for value? Could information itself better represent value? Information is a larger and more inclusive concept than money. Could information become the currency of a new barter system, a true information economy?

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Endnotes
4. Ibid. p. 1460.

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Reports of Meetings — ALCTS, InfoToday 2002, and MLA In Dallas

Column Editor: Sever Bordeianu (University of Mexico) <sever@unm.edu>

ALCTS Acquisitions Librarians/Vendors of Library Materials Discussion Group, Atlanta, Georgia, June 13, 2002

Report by Janet L. Flowers (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) <janet_flowers@unc.edu>

The ALCTS Acquisitions Librarians/Vendors of Library Materials Discussion Group had a lively review of the changing landscape at their annual meeting in Atlanta on June 13th, 2002. Three panelists presented their views on a series of ten questions with audience participation between each question. The panelists were Ann-Marie Breaux from YBP, Colin Harrison from Everetts, and Forrest Link from Midwest Library Services. As the moderator, I took notes on the very interesting and thoughtful comments that were made and share them here so others can reflect upon the issues raised. However, to make my task easier and to protect from issues of liability, I am not going to attempt to attribute the comments but merely summarize them.

The audience was asked to consider these questions as the panelists made their comments. The audience was invited to speak after comments on each question. Do you agree or disagree with the speakers' comments on this question? Why or why not? What has been your continued on page 75
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experience in these areas? What concerns do you have regarding the changing vendor/library relationship? What suggestions do you have for meeting those concerns?

Question #1.
What are some of the changes you have observed in the vendor/library landscape within the past five years?
- Rise in technical services operations on behalf of libraries
- 75% of orders placed with the company electronically
- Spending less time in meetings reviewing the approval plan profiles
- Libraries looking for one-stop shopping
- Some interest developing in e-books
- More formal requests for proposals and bids being submitted
- Greater involvement with consortia
- Price becoming more paramount as a consideration

Fewer number of experienced acquisitions librarians
Reduction in role of acquisitions librarian in decision making
Decentralized buying
Greater demand for electronic services
Meetings involving more staff from the libraries
Much harder to get appointments with librarians
Librarians want much more than books
Online competition
Amazon effect
E-resources
Audience: Problem with unsolicited materials
Use of local bookstores

Question #2
What market forces do you see as driving these changes?
- Budgetary pressures
- Publisher consolidations
- Term reductions from publishers squeezing profit margin for vendors
- Publishers attempting to sell directly to customers
- Increase in e-commerce, e.g., the credit or purchasing card
- Increased use of email to conduct business
- Blurring between sales and customer service at vendors
- Staff shortages in libraries
- Difficulty filling acquisitions positions
- Book budgets being squeezed

Lack of programs to train new acquisitions librarians
Difficult to grow market share
Amazon raised the bar
Audience: Concerns over lack of programs for acquisitions librarians in library schools

Question #3
How has your company adapted or changed to meet these new needs?
- More customer contact
- Scrutinizing marginal accounts (in past larger customers tended to subsidize smaller or less-profitable customers)
- More interest in reasonable requests
- Became PromptCat supplier
- More catalogers and book processors!
- More dealings with ILS vendors
- Purchase by B&T, provided access to inventory and possible new areas of service, such as AV materials
- Flirtation with another vendor as partner; even though did not last was a great learning experience and led to improvements in internal operations and new visions for service
- More efficient processes being developed
- Less willing to bend systems (cannot afford the customization)

Request from Audience: Please tell customers right up front if you cannot supply certain types of material!!

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Question # 4
What changes have resulted in your relationships with librarians?
More kinds of staff in meetings at libraries (selectors, acquisitions, cataloging, financial staff, administrators, systems)
Lose some of the closeness with customers
Relationships becoming less relaxed and more commercial
Less time for dialogue
Past relationship was more personal
On the other hand, the committee approach to decision-making regarding vendor selection provides a certain level of stability
Comments from Audience: Always talk to the acquisitions librarian no matter how many people are involved in the library
Be careful about not getting too dependent upon one vendor's service
Be clear about who has the authority to place orders in the library; usually it is not the selector!!
More systems to learn

Question # 5
How do you view these changes? Are they good, bad, or indifferent?
Some of all three
Efficiencies gained through technology

Question # 6
What have we lost and what have we gained in this transition?
Relationships less relaxed and more commercial
Less time for dialogue which is not good
Business really is relationship selling — past with one person was more personal and more forgiveness than the current environment
Audience Comments: Not enough time to be aware of services offered by current vendors much less those of vendors not used!!
Advice to vendors to email changes to customers rather than relying upon them to go to Websites
Concern over positions lost and duties replaced by vendors — caution that librarians should be careful about not becoming too dependent upon a vendor

Question # 7
How can we maintain ethical relationships in these times of increased pressures upon all?
Tongue in cheek comment: ethics high until one gets to the publishers (of which there were none in the audience)
Contracts provide some protection
Service level expectations help ensure Community has high expectations
Disclosure of financial relationships can help
More bids and proposals formalize
Plea from vendors: Allow adequate time for response to these bids and proposals and then decide promptly!

Question # 8
How can we promote healthy competition to ensure that we continue to have options while at the same time meeting the new definitions of needs, such as shelf-ready processing?
In the past, was price based; more factors now Hard to break into new markets
Tongue in cheek: federal legislation

Question # 9
What do you need from acquisitions librarians as you develop your business models and design new services or as you seek a niche for existing services?
Honesty
Openness
Patientness
Thoughtfulness
Budget projections as early as possible and impact upon business with vendor

Question # 10
What concerns do you have regarding the changing vendor/library relationship? What suggestions do you have for meeting those challenges?
Craying of the profession
Specialists other than acquisitions librarians handling acquisitions matters; lack of expertise
Very complex accounts — difficult to manage and remember
Concern about staff turnover and lack of adequate documentation
Consolidation of vendors

Note from Audience Member: New vendors are coming, including publishers, local booksstores, online companies (actually more choices now than a few year's ago)
This meeting was open and honest and frank and I hope that the attendees came away with a better understanding of the changing landscape.

Report by Burton Callcott (College of Charleston, Robert Scott Small Library)

The slick and massive InfoToday 2002 Conference, May 14-16, went off with a muted but still substantial bang this year. I don't know if it was a coping mechanism or simply a resignation to the current state of world affairs on my part, but when I signed up to attend this annual conference in New York City, September 11 did not really cross my mind. It was not until Anthea Strageto, I believe, thanked the attendees for "coming to New York" and encouraged everyone to "shop and attend Broadway shows" during her kick off address that I felt the reverberations of the terrorist attacks and noticed that there were plenty of empty seats. I do not have official figures but I did overhear one of the vendors mention as he was packing up that attendance was down from previous years. Yet, like the rest of New York, the U.S. and the world, the conference soldiered on.

As per usual, "InfoToday" is essentially a framework for bringing three conferences together into one location in order to share common ideas, key note speakers, and an exhibit hall. Presentations were tracked by the NationalOnline, KnowledgeNets, and E-Libraries organizations. The boundaries between these tracks was sometimes blurred but by having them all together, public to corporate and public service to techie librarians were sure to find something interesting and worthwhile. Being an academic public service librarian, I mainly stuck to my assigned NationalOnline track but I did manage to sneak into a few of the more enticing E-Libraries presentations. Well funded attendees could pay extra to receive a "gold pass" that allowed unrestricted access to all presentations. I do not know if it was my innocent expression or a laissez faire policy on the part of the conference guards, but I was never stopped at any of the "E-Library" doors. Presentations went on throughout the day and with each of the three major tracks divided into two separate tracks, there were many presentations from which to choose. As is generally the case, the presentations with the sexiest titles were often the least interesting — "Crystal Balling the Info Pros Future" — and vice versa — "Pay for Hits." Of course the mainstay of the presentations focused on the now classic (and now somewhat tired) "e" discussions such as Web search engines, search friendly Web design, virtual reference, etc.

One of new and potentially exciting topics to emerge from the conference had to do with employing the spatial, "3-D" capabilities of the Web to revolutionize the way we search and "interact" with databases. Tula Giannini's presentation of her study, "Comparing Information Seeking Behavior in Real and Virtual Environments" was a prime example. Giannini focused on the initial stages of the research project where one topic begins to take shape and direction. This is the one aspect of the research process that has been underserved and overlooked by current information technology. Rather than confront tangible documents and experience the natural relationships between ideas as they flow from book to book and page to page, modern researchers face an empty, often times intimidating and alienating search box.

The search "box" typifies what users see as they begin a search — an empty box on a page with virtually no content indication. The box and blank page approach pose a major obstacle to users trying to formulate a topic and search. Representing a vacuum information environment, its usability depends on accessing knowledge residing in the user's (and librarian's) retrievable memory. This places a weighty burden on the user.

Giannini regards this online obstacle as an opportunity for librarians to create Web sites that guide and direct researchers rather than present them with a meaningless, imploring cursor. She suggests that we capitalize on the prevalence and power of the Web to offer users a more fully

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realized menu of information, one that fills the stumbling gap created by classic computer database interfaces. Or, as Giannini states it, envision a search interface that “operates on many levels concurrently and creates distinct zones of function and content, which importantly, define the “information community.” Giannini had few examples of sites that succeeded in this way, Medscape’s WebMD Health Network www.medscape.com was one, but the feeling I got at this conference was that we will soon see more creative and better attempts to present information in a highly spatial and relational way using the Web.

Giannini’s presentation represented the best and the worst of this conference. This very informative and timely discussion was shoehorned into a forty-five minute time slot that was shared with two other presenters. On top of this, valuable minutes of this session were wasted trying to get the audio and video systems to work properly. Sadly this was a common feature of most of the presentation rooms where microphones frequently did not work and video jacks were intermittent. The physical space as well was a bit tattered as the Hilton Towers appeared to be undergoing some much needed rehabilitation of its conference facilities. Attendees had to make their way past curtained areas and follow signs through maze-like hallways.

Moderators went to great and sometimesalmost rude lengths to keep presentations to their assigned forty-five minute slots. This was in order to allow for sufficient time for the all important networking — a full half hour between presentations. I did very little networking during this conference. Although I am a rather shy person and a weak networker, I did not seem to be the only one making frequent glances at my watch and making the most of slow meanders down cold florescent Hilton hallways (for some reason, the only way an annoying honking noise coming from the ceiling could be quieted was to turn air conditioning on full blast). The little networking that did seem to be taking place was sporadic and fleeting. Perhaps it was the lack of an obvious space to gather or the solitary nature of the online world, but there seemed to be little discussion outside of the presentation rooms and the exhibit area.

The exhibit hall was comparable to the conference at large; a few standouts in an otherwise level field. In addition to the tried and true vendor presence — Ebsco, Dialog, OCLC, etc. — there were a couple of new and interesting appearances. Antariti.ca was one such example. Their “Visual Net” is a software package that runs on top of databases and allows search results to be displayed cartographically. In other words, each search brings up a clickable map of resources available where the size and location of each “country” of information reflects the amount of material available and its theoretical relationship to surrounding information. In a similar vein, Plum Design’s “Decision Support Visualization” platform also seeks to provide new and better ways to search and present results. In my opinion Plum Design won the award for the most arresting and exciting display of information. It is difficult to convey textually, but search results are exhibited in a kind of three dimensional way such that key words appear to revolve around a central concept much like moons orbiting around a planet. Each “satellite” is clickable and with each click a new whole “world” of information is created. Plum Design has been employed mainly for commercial purposes to this point I believe, and is not quite ready for prime time research applications at this time. However, the idea and look were exciting and I think representative of the type of thing librarians can expect to see more of in the future.

Despite the lack of a real buzz at the conference, it was wonderful to be in New York City during that one too week period in spring and fall when the weather can be perfect. And it was wonderfully crisp and clear outside most of the days of the conference. The keynote speakers were also quite exceptional. Of particular note was David Snowden, Director of the Institute for Knowledge Management. Although the essence of his talk, which was delivered artfully and flawlessly, had to do with corporate management, he snuck in a powerful and eye opening history lesson. In his wonderful British accent, Snowden compared the War of 1812 to the events of September 11 and deftly pointed out the similarities between the political realities and hawkish actions of America in 1812 and Afghanistan/Iraq 2001. I cannot do his argument justice here but he delivered a bitter and devastating message that has most everyone re-evaluating their feelings and opinions about the recent events in U.S. history and the Middle East. The essence of his talk had to do with the importance of being able to see situations from many different points of view in order to be a successful manager and leader. It was a masterful performance. Stephen Abram’s address, “Content is Dead! Long Live Context!” was also informative, on the money, and full of wit. Some of Abram’s slides that dramatized new handheld technology were brilliantly funny.

Pat Schroeder’s talk on the other hand was not as controversial as expected. In fact, her delivery was rather flat and at times disturbing. Schroeder appeared to be off her game the morning of May 16th and all too aware of the time slowly ticking by as she fished for questions from the audience once she had run out of ways of lashing out at third world countries for making unlicensed copies of U.S. textbooks. Constantly harping on the “problem” of a lack of global copyright enforcement, Schroeder appeared to be totally out of touch with the current and future state of publishing. It seems clear that traditional definitions and concepts that have defined copyright are simply not applicable as we run headlong into an increasingly electronic world. The textbook companies for which she lobbies have no choice but to adapt and adopt a completely new approach to their business or it would seem that they face a bleak future of flamed copyrights and piracy.

As may be expected, Information Today, Inc. has a Website (http://www.infortoday.com) that lists resources and future conferences. Included in the site is a list of presenter links as well as the full conference proceedings for the Info Today 2002 conference.


102nd Annual Meeting of the Medical Library Association

Report by Lucretia W. McClure

The 102nd Annual Meeting of the Medical Library Association convened May 17-23 in Dallas with the “Big D” flavor of Digital Developments, Diverse Innovations, and Delightful Diversions. Nearly 2,000 attendees enjoyed a conference packed with information, inspiring speakers, an array of exhibits, and time to connect with colleagues, both old friends and new.

The John P. McGovern Lecture was presented by Seaborn B. Weathers, M.D., Co-Director of Medical City Dallas Hospital and LabCorp of Dallas. He told the dramatic story of his survival on Mt. Everest in his talk, “Surviving Everest: Against All Odds.” He published an account of his experience in “Left for Dead: My Journey Home from Everest.” A second lecture was presented by William Strauss, a partner and co-founder of LifeCourse Associates in Great Falls, Virginia and co-founder and director of the Capitol Steps, a nationally known political satire troupe. His talk, “Generations in the Workplace,” identified the characteristics of the generations from the Vietnam War to Generation X.

A third major address, the Janet Doe Lecture, is one by an MLA member. Named for the librarian of the New York Academy of Medicine Library and one of the great medical librarians of the 20th century, the Doe Lecture is on a topic of historical or current medical interest. This year’s Doe Lecturer was Jacqueline Doyle, manager of Clinical Innovation and Continuing Medical Education, Banner Health System of Phoenix. Her talk was titled “A Job with a View: Perspectives from the Corporate Side of Health Care.”

Attendees had to juggle committee meetings, contributed paper and poster sessions, and open forums, the usual myriad of offerings at a national meeting. The great hall with nearly 100 exhibitors was another major attraction. There were book publishers, database vendors, subscription agents and all manner of other service and product providers. Many provided demonstrations of new continued on page 76

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Inside Pandora’s Box  
Changes In Technology Provide Opportunities For Organizational Change: A Case Study  
by Rhonda Glazer (Emporia State University)  
Column Editor: Jack Montgomery (Western Kentucky University)  
<jack.montgomery@wk.edu>

During 1998 William Allen White Library (WAWL) at Emporia State University began the process of implementing a new integrated library system (ILS). This new system had many capabilities not available in the previous system, including a real-time acquisition's module. With this module in mind, the procedures for allocating, tracking, and accounting for the materials budget were analyzed. After that analysis, several problems were identified and changes made.

Prior to 1998 the acquisition's budget was given out on a ‘first come, first serve’ basis. This meant that orders were placed as received, with priority given to university faculty in the departments on campus, followed by library faculty. Library faculty were given specific subject areas in which to order materials, but there was no clear relationship between the area of selection and the departments on campus. This meant that the library faculty who ordered early in the fiscal year were guaranteed their materials, while orders placed later in the year might not be funded due to lack of money. It also meant that more than one library faculty member represented some departments on campus and other departments had minimal representation.

A second problem identified during the analysis was that the amount spent for each department could potentially vary greatly each year. Since all reports were based on an amount spent by Dewey call number, more than one department could potentially receive reports that allocate the same money to multiple departments. This made it very difficult to clearly reflect the budget and how it was spent. In addition, questions would occur as to where the different Dewey number expenditures should be reported. Because of this confusion, working on accreditation reports became very time consuming. Finally, if a request came early in the year from a department wanting to know how much money they had to spend, an accurate answer could not be given since it depended on the library faculty getting materials ordered ahead of their colleagues.

A final problem identified had to do with the electronic database budget. There was no specific budget for electronic databases and no formal means for selecting or evaluating the databases purchased by the library. Over the years individual library faculty members approached the library dean about purchasing electronic databases. It was at the director's discretion to approve and find funding for these new databases. Since it was done on an individual basis, that meant that the library faculty were never sure if a new database would be approved, and many times no extensive analysis was done before it was added.

The initial step taken to change how materials were purchased at WAWL was the formation of a selection committee. This committee was comprised of all library faculty currently selecting materials for the library. Each faculty member was then assigned specific departments to represent and criteria for setting up a liaison relationship with that department. Most of the library faculty received departments that were closely associated with the type of materials they had been selecting in the past. These departments that were not represented in the first round were split between the library faculty according to size and selection load. If a library faculty member was already ordering for a large department, a smaller department would be added to their load, instead of another large department.

One of the initial goals of this committee was to try and routinize and structure communication between the library and the departmental faculty. The ideal was to have each library faculty member representing at least two or three departments, delivering the same type of information to each department. Library faculty members were asked to meet with each department they represent at least once each semester. In addition, whenever special events were happening at the library, the library faculty member was responsible for sending that information out to the departments they represented.

After being assigned to specific departments, each library faculty member determined what fund codes (or subject areas) they wanted broken out for that department. No limit was placed on the number of individual fund codes that could be assigned to a department. For example, the English Department has fund codes for popular fiction, literature and English. The School of Library and Information Management...