2005

Back Talk -- OCLC Report

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This act of stimulating the public square they are immensely assisted by the robust local booksellers possessed of not simply the aim of economic survival but serving readers as fully as possible.

This ethical concern extends to the management of inventories as well. The niche publishers have for centuries endeavored to keep their lists in print as long as possible, now a much more readily achieved objective with the introduction of affordable print-on-demand technology. The serious booksellers also seek to make as wide an inventory available to readers as possible.

Out of concentration has arisen a revived version of the classic book-person.

Mirabile dictu, to this book-trade old hand the trade of the book remains firmly embedded in the centuries old mold of the scholar-publisher, the erudite bookseller, and the learned librarian, all masters serving the traditional intellectual and ethical cultural exercise of advancing the evolving search for truth and goodness.

Search engine. Therefore, I suggest we simply stop trying and instead make sure that our students are the most accomplished Google clients on the planet. Next let’s understand what Google can’t offer: current eBooks; books that never go electronic; current e-journal articles; e-journals that never go open access; local content that cannot be shared with the world; paperbacks that are easily read in bed at the beach in the bathtub, and whatever else your patrons want but can’t get freely/easily on the Web. And

By the way, what’s happening with claims? They seem to be running away from us. What’s so difficult about actually getting issues you pay for? Do vendors just make lists and charge money, then become mute? We have a bunch of active reps trying to find out why publishers just don’t send things when they are paid. Sure puts a crimp on our ability to provide access to those titles. We try to track claims every two weeks to stay on top, because I am tired of getting notices that we have waited too long to claim. What’s too long? Sometimes I feel we need to claim before they are published so we have a 50-50 chance of getting them. Just kidding, but it does get frustrating! Hmmm? Do online full text sources use this frustration to snatch us from the print world? Are we being manipulated? I hate the thought. I don’t remember this much confusion with the old one on one, get it from the source subscription style. Well, it’s something to think about anyway.

My other task to complete in January is the Collection Development list for serials. We have a request for new material, the OCLC record, Ulrich’s indexing and review information, and a sample issue clumped together in a folder, so that all the librarians can evaluate the material and vote on its worthiness. We route the folders to everyone, then wait for the return package and tallying of the votes. Our patrons eagerly await the results. This year we are looking at a number of good aviation titles, as well as some on terrorism, hearing, engineering physics and a few leisure titles. Should be an interesting and exciting time.

We acquire new materials, make them accessible to patrons, help them find any of the materials they need and then we weed. A year in review, but not without the preservation we do everyday in cleaning, repairing and binding. We are preparing binding at this moment since the classes will be ending in a week. Nothing like seeing paper things in a new dress or binding with clear lettering. It’s like starting new again. Have a great year and look forward to your many tasks. They can be new and adventurous when you see them in a different light. Try it!
Back Talk — OCLC Report

December 2005 was a momentous month for the information world. We learned, surprise, surprise, that our Patriot Act President wasn’t satisfied with openly seeking information about the American people and resorted to “legal” secret information gathering.1 And for a moment at least, the library world was accused of helping the FBI learn more about the reading habits of college students. A student at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth claimed his borrowing of Mao’s Little Red Book brought with it a visit from the FBI.2 OCLC was scrambling to make sure no one thought it had fed the Feds this information — which of course it had not.

Boring by comparison, but the most important information related event of the month was OCLC’s release of its Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources (2005).3 While this report may not stack up well against the most recent John Grisham crime novel as bed time reading, I found it very interesting and believe it has something of value for all librarians. First the good news: “Over 80 percent of U.S. youth and young adults, respondents 14 to 24 years old, hold a library card — more than any other U.S. demographic.”4 (p. 1-1) And now the bad news: “Nearly one-third of respondents say their library use has decreased in the past three to five years.”5 (p. 1-1). The question for those of us working on the service provider side of the desk is: How do we prevent the other 2/3rds from following them? I can’t summarize all the interesting facts and figures that appear in the report but will share those that appealed to me as a librarian working at a university library:

- 50 percent of college students indicated that they thought their use of libraries would remain the same and only 12 percent thought their use would decrease. (1-6)
- 44 percent thought their use of libraries had increased and only 16 percent thought it had decreased in recent years. (1-4)
- 62 percent of college students were extremely or very familiar with search engines but only 55 percent said the same of the physical library. (1-10)
- While 83 percent of college students indicated they used search engines, only 61 percent had used a library’s web site and only 8 percent had used an online reference service. (1-13)
- 89 percent of college students indicated they typically began searches with a search engine while only 2 percent said they went to a library Website. (1-17)
- An 18-year-old in Canada noted, “I despise searching the library for books and other sources. It takes a long time and rarely can you find sources needed. This difficult process is the first thing I think of when I think of using the library.” (1-22)
- 92 percent of college students rate search engines as very or somewhat favorable source/place for information while 85 percent said the same for the physical library. (1-24)
- 85 percent of college students agree or completely agree that electronic magazines/journals are worthwhile sources of information. (1-33)
- At least monthly, 48 percent of college students use the library for study and 39 percent borrowed books. (2-4)
- The top three online library activities for college students are to use the library’s Website, 56 percent; use electronic magazines/journals, 49 percent; and use the library’s online catalog, 47 percent. (2-13)
- 33 percent of all college students have asked for a librarian’s help when using electronic resources; 54 percent have not. (2-17)
- 75 percent of college students agreed or completely agreed that librarians added value to the information search process. (2-10)

60 percent of college students were very satisfied with the overall information seeking experience using a search engine while less than 50 percent of them felt that way when they sought assistance from a librarian.

I could go on an on but will stop here and ask myself and all of you, what? What does this all mean? For me it signifies that we are on a downward slope in terms of our war to win the hearts and minds of our student clientele — compared to that of the search engine alternative.

But I don’t view the slope as slippery as yet. Eighty-five percent of students value our costly e-journals; 75 percent feel reference librarians add value; and 48 percent still come to the library to study. Yet, the evidence is there that our electronic mother nature is spraying a bit of grease around: 89 percent of students start an information search with a search engine; and 92 percent of them rate the experience as good — leading librarians at 85 percent. But students are still not completely satisfied with either search engines (60 percent) or librarians (30 percent). So where do we go from here?

The OCLC report asked library patrons what they thought libraries should do. I think you will find the suggestions comfortably and/or annoyingly familiar (I have translated these suggestions into my own words):

- Buy more content/update content.
- Provide longer hours.
- Relax the rules/be less bureaucratic.
- Get rid of charges.
- Provide more seating, more comfortable seating.
- Make the library a more inviting place, e.g., add a cafe.
- Decrease the noise.
- Hire more staff, more friendly staff, and smarter staff.

I don’t deny any of these suggestions and my library, like yours, is working on most of them to one degree or another. We need to make our libraries super easy to use, friendly to a scary degree, and more inviting than home (easy since most homes don’t welcome a dozen or so friends in search of study, food, music, talk, computers, printers, etc.). But will this be enough? Do any of these suggestions deal with what our students hail as wonderful about the Google alternative?

What is it that Google does so well and can’t we do it even better? For me, what I like about Google is it is fast and it gives me full text — not (shudder) metadata/abstracts, etc. For most common, pedestrian informational needs libraries and librarians can’t compete with a good

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