Issues in Vendor/Library Relations — Google

Column Editor: Bob Nardini (Senior Vice President & Head Bibliographer, YBP Library Services, 999 Maple St., Contoocook, NH 03229; Ph: 800-258-3774 x. 3251; Fax: 603-746-5628 <mnardini@ybp.com>

No self-respecting librarian would be caught dead today, of course, only using the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature. But, if you can find a set in your local Reference Department and if you can carry off a few volumes to a secluded corner of the room, it's easy to conduct an interesting little piece of research. Try to find the earliest entry for “Google.” Which volume to choose? While by now it's become all but impossible to imagine life without everyone's favorite search engine, it's also hard to imagine so much as to remember the world prior to Google. How did we look things up in those days? Well, back to the question, which days? How about ten years ago, 1995? No, way too early. That was the year Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin met one another, as graduate students at Stanford. 1997? Warm, but still no sign of Google, which didn't launch until the year after.

Not until 1999, a mere six years ago, did the Readers' Guide need to create the subject heading, “GOOGLE (INTERNET SEARCH ENGINE).” That 1999 volume indexed all of two articles, one in Forbes, one in Fortune. The Forbes article, entitled “1k%58%,” asked if there were “any more exasperating experience than trying to search for something on the Web?” It indicted the all-too-literary AltaVista and a few of the other extant search engines. But “promising new software offers a bit of hope,” said Forbes, whose reporter described three new search engines. Two of them, “Direct Hit” and “Clever,” in the end proved not enough of either.

The third was Google. The 2000 Readers' Guide volume indexed ten articles—a quintupled literature—featured a new subject heading, “GOOGLE, INC.,” and unveiled even a Google subheading, “Securities.” By 2004, the year of Google's IPO, which brought in $1.7 billion—a good thing, that “Securities” subheading—the monthly paperbound volumes listed more articles than any annual cumulation had indexed to that point. Tracing the trajectory of Google: that's a job for the Readers' Guide. Don't try it in Google (where, in case you're interested, a search under “Google” returns over 243,000,000 results).

It took no time to put some of that new capital to work. The most audacious Google ideas, it turned out, had to do with libraries. In November was the announcement of “Google Scholar,” a super-index to scholarly literature. Then, one month later, in an expansion of the “Google Print” program begun earlier—where Google results display excerpts from certain in-print books—the company announced a library digitization project on a scale that in pre-Google times, meaning just a little while ago, would have been unimaginable. Five of the world’s leading research libraries—Stanford, Michigan, Harvard, Oxford’s Bodleian, and New York Public Library—announced plans to work with Google to digitize their collections; for Stanford and Michigan, their entire collections, in- and out-of-print, about 15 million volumes between them. Digitization was nothing new to these libraries, but the Google scale was new. Michigan, for example, a pioneer, had on its own been digitizing fewer than 10,000 volumes per year. Google planned to digitize everything the library had, in just seven years.
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meeting officially known as “Chief Collection Development Officers of Large Research Libraries,” but in real life always called “Big Heads.”

This regular Saturday morning session, never known as a headline-maker, was a good show indeed this time; the first public forum in the pro-

motion since the Google news broke. “Be nice to your undergraduates,” advised Mark Sandler, representing Michigan, alma mater of Larry Page, “you never know when they might succeed.”

Big Heads is usually the most collegial of groups, but in Boston the Google libraries said there were some things they were not so keen to talk about. It was like a Congressional hearing, as if they’d brought counsel. The many unanswered copyright questions, sure to keep law firms occu-
pied for many years, accounted for some of the saintliness. But each of the five partners of Google, as well, has its own financial deal, its own operational plans, and its own ideas, as yet not fully formed, on how in the years ahead to make best use of the bibliographic, technological, and intellectual windfall with which they’ve been blessed. They are partners with Google, not with one another. Google’s ultimate plans, for that matter, remain unclear too.

Matching these moments of non-disclosure on the part of the Google libraries were one or two slight quotes from non-participants. To be fair, on a number of fronts at this point it’s no sure thing that Google’s plan will succeed at all. A good summary of why not can be found in a Library Journal interview with Alice Prochaska, University Librarian at Yale, which was not one of the topics approached by Google. Prochaska raised questions about the risk of damaging books in such a mass digitization project, on metadata standards, on the level of duplication among the parallel projects, and on the randomness of such a vast digital collection versus digital content selected and packaged for users. But on one thing, at least, Prochaska veri-
fied that the project is already an unqualified suc-
cess. “If I had a regret,” she told LJ, “it is that we missed out on the publicity.”

Yale was not alone in public doubt. American Library Association president-elect Michael Gorman, most notably, compared Google to fast food. And yet the phenomenon is a wonderful modern manifestation of the tri-
umph of hope and boosterism over reality.” In a story that played everywhere, Jacques Chirac, president of France, proposed a European chal-
lenge to Google Print, one that would curb the “omnipotence,” he said, of the American company’s crime. The French official put it, and gives students an alter-
native to Googling their way in English through, say, the French Revolution, an example chosen by the director of France’s national library.

One didn’t need to be president of anything, of course, in order to dissent from Google’s vi-
sion. A representative online comment referred to it as “a Faustian bargain.” Library collections in the past, this critic argued, “have served as their own advertisement, but now they will become a vehi-
cle for selling something else.” Much of the commentary, on the other hand, was quite posi-
tive, if a little wonder-struck at the boldness and scale of Google Print. “I think what Google are undertaking in this program is truly fantastic!” one blogger recorded. “To have all that information available through Google will really bring infor-
mation that would be otherwise unobtainable to the masses.”

The idea of a universal library is far from a new one, but the dream always came mixed with a good dose of sc-fi. More than that, librarians were supposed to be in charge of the universal li-
brary, weren’t they? Now, from nowhere, there’s a plausible model resembling the universal library and who’s running things but a pair of 30-some-
thing grad-school entrepreneurs who set out to organize all of the world’s information and knew that meant making a deal with librarians. The aca-
demicians now in all the history of the academic society’s boldest innovations, is a suddenly partner with an organization recognized by everyone as a marvel of capitalist innovation.

But, the truly remarkable thing is that when capitalists finally took note of libraries, what they noticed wasn’t their hi-tech apparatus, but their books, printed books. And they wanted old books, the ones in the most obscure, many of them still classified in Dewey or in some home-

made pre-LC system, the ones dusted off every decade or two and borrowed less often than that, the forgotten books, problematic in every way, to some librarians their most unloved belong-
ings, almost an embarrassment. If those books can find a savior like Google, and capture the world’s imagination—who knows?—one day perhaps even the Readers’ Guide will make a comeback. 📚

Technology Left Behind—Where Have All the Catalogers Gone?

Column Editor: Cris Ferguson (Electronic Resources/Serials Librarian, James B. Duke Library, Furman University, 3300 Poinsett Highway, Greenville, SC 29613; Phone: 864-294-2713) <cris.ferguson@furman.edu>

Recent announcements of job openings at libraries at colleges and universities across the country demonstrate a growing trend in the cataloging field, the creation of metadata-re-
lated positions and an emphasis on metadata schemas other than MARC. Libraries of all shapes and sizes are creating new positions with varying degrees of emphasis on metadata duties.

Wanting to find out a little more about the duties of a Metadata Librarian and the impetus for creating a metadata position, I interviewed several professionals in the field, including librarians at Princeton University, the University of Tennes-
see, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the University of Virginia.

The Metadata Librarian position at the Princeton University Library was created in 2003 as part of an initiative to get more involved in digi-
tal libraries. It was the first position to be filled in the newly formed Digital Initiatives department (http://digitlib.princeton.edu/). Since then a digital photographer, a Web designer, and a programmer have all been added to the department. Digital Ini-

tiatives has focused its efforts on rare and antiquarian books and materials in Princeton’s Special Collections, and recently the department launched the prototype of Princeton’s digital library.

Hired in March 2003, Clay Redding’s duties as Metadata Librarian are varied, involving generat-
ing metadata, correlating the metadata to objects, and constructing the back end architecture of the database. Other tasks include management of the Princeton Library’s link resolver and manipulation of MARC and XML data. Lately Redding has focused his efforts on the creation of forms and finding other ways to automate the various tasks involved in creating the digital library.

While his position reports to the Head of Tech-
nical Services, Redding works in close conjunction with the Systems department. He feels his job du-
ties are more systems and programming related than most other metadata positions. As a conse-
quence, Redding founded the metadata librarians listserv (http://metadatalibrarians.monachos.com) as a resource for professionals in variety of fields dealing with metadata issues and a way to person-

ally keep abreast of the field.

The University of Tennessee Libraries (UT) created the Digital Library Center (DLC) in 2004 to “foster the creation and use of digital images.” Examples of the types of projects the DLC has taken on include collections of photographs of the Tennessee River Valley and early images of Egypt (http://
digitlib.utk.edu/dlc/projects.html). The Metadata Librarian position at UT was created a little over three years ago to support the ef-

forts of the DLC. The current Metadata Librarian, Arwen Hutt, manages the Digital Access unit, a division of Technical Services. The unit is responsible for scanning and digitizing books and maps, as well as the creation of metadata design, and production for the DLC projects. Hutt describes her level of involvement in the local digi-
tal projects as “ranging from responsibility for all metadata and digital production to a more advisory role, determining standards and workflow and con-
ducting training.” In addition to working with the DLC, she also advises other university and com-

munity projects on metadata and digitization issues.

According to JoAnne Deeken, Head of Tech-
nical Services at the UT Libraries, the goal from the very beginning was to integrate the DLC into the library as a whole, rather than emphasizing it as a separate unit. The Digital Access unit works closely with MARC catalogers, especially when it is neces-
sary to map one metadata standard to another.

Several years ago the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) began OpenCourseWare (OCW), a unique initiative with the ambitious goal of making all of the course materials from MIT classes available to students and educators throughout the world. The project is "a large-scale, Web-based electronic publish-
ing initiative funded jointly by the William and Flora
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