February 2010

@Brunning: People & Technology: At the only Edge that Means Anything/How We Understand What We Do

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Recommended Citation
Brunning, Dennis (2010) "@Brunning: People & Technology: At the only Edge that Means Anything/How We Understand What We Do," Against the Grain: Vol. 22: Iss. 1, Article 27.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.5857

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The most popular “impact cps” is the grade tracking site for Chicago Public Schools. There are two transportation system websites, a popular blog, a local online edition of the Sun-Times newspaper, a local entertainment weekly newspaper, and a local no-kill animal shelter. Interestingly, four sites are higher education sites. Repeated throughout the city by city accounts are education sites and most impressively many library sites. Admittedly there are also many jail sites which bear some kinship with public school grade tracking sites (progress through a system!).

It’s difficult to say what the search scientists at Google make of these popularities. It’s probably read as the dominance of the Internet by youth (who else goes to school, gets in trouble, and takes the bus...). More practically, it illustrates how simple we understand search; and that search is local.

What we need to know, though, is what users search when they arrive from Google to the sought after cyberplace. And this Google isn’t telling us. We assume this is proprietary and the Zeitgeist here will remain secret and protected. For librarians, however, it is edifying to confirm our space is unique, popular, and local.
Let’s Get Back to Lending — and Why You Should Buy the National Geographic on DVD

Apologies to public libraries. You lend for a living. You even want to buy Kindles, Nooks, and Sony E-Readers to lend.

At academic libraries we’ve seemed to have forgotten about lending. Our circulation numbers are going down. Even IOLS sales people shuffle their feet at the mention of circ systems. Oops—we have an overpriced module in a library environment habituated to aggregated access. Sorry — you have books?

We know we shouldn’t think this way, but we do. It’s sad and a bit wrong. Unlike our bankers, we should lend.

Take National Geographic on DVD for example. NATGEO, as they liked to be called, has put together an imaged collection of all their magazines since 1888 on fast-access, visually stunning digital video. Powered by Adobe AIR, the industry leader in visual and text presentation, this is a neat package. In six DVDs you get a base-level, one-more-per-issue module in a library environment habituated to aggregated access. Sorry — you have books?

As the DVD box says, every page of every issue. We might add — digitization done right — no thumbs, canted or missing pages, and similar artifacts of rushed digital preservation. Microsoft Bing is on board with a nifty browser allowing search and browse by political map or terrain.

Academic librarians will always ask — is it online? Can it at least be networked? Wrong questions. Some stuff just doesn’t require the added cost of online license. The National Geographic experience is born in individual discovery and serendipity. You glance at an issue at the library. You even want to buy something from the like. As they liked to be called, they have it put together — an appropriate collection of legal resources that fits an external hard drive small enough to hold in your hand and conforms to right-of-access guidelines while controlling the costs of expensive upkeep and space for printed materials.

We’re sure that law librarians and especially corrections librarians are aware of library 2.0 in the big house. Still let’s share some more:

- easy to use, easily searchable “reducing inmate complaints”
- Works offline without “security risks with Internet Access and the costs associated with print publications.”
- always current “easy-to-install updates, ensure inmates have the latest decisions.”
- doesn’t require specialized IT “plug-and-play simplicity, through USB 2.0 port, quickly connects or disconnects to your network or computer.”

Wonder if it is lock-jack compliant in the event of loss? Can it be baked into a cake?


Another Ranganathian Moment

Neglect at peril publisher direct mail. Our mail basket brims with catalogs, announcements, prize contests, mail-back postcards and the like. We’ve not reached the tipping point of “e” over “p” in this marketing medium. Not even close. Why do publishers persist in this deluge? Haven’t they learned about the needle in the haystack conundrum?

It is, though, sort of fun to spend a rainy day sorting through office mail.

Recently a LexisNexis Mathew Bender Arizona Law Enforcement Publications brochure founds its way our way. Once you buy something from LexisNexis you become a pen pal for the rest of your life. It’s a great friendship since no upkeep is involved on your part. Someone or something at LexisNexis thinks about you and just wants you to know “we’re here, here for you.”

Print and CD-ROM with updates dominate this part of legal research. We’ve got handbooks, field guides, manuals, “laws,” and preparation. Who’s got space for all this erudition? The best lawyers wield only the most slender of briefcases; less is more for these legal guys and gals. And cops—well, they’ve got more important stuff like Taser gun instructions to pocket.

What’s that laptop in the squad car for?

One title that might raise the eyebrow of cop and prosecuting attorney is LexisNexis Legal Research Solutions for Prisons. LNPRSFP, as the brochure is, it is an “entire inmate library… a single external hard drive.” We learn that the LexisNexis Corrections Team has worked closely with corrections officials to put together “an appropriate collection of legal resources that fits an external hard drive small enough to hold in your hand and conforms to right-of-access guidelines while controlling the costs of expensive upkeep and space for printed materials.”

To search books, journals, and more, you need heavier lifting than what Aqua-Browser provides. Here the big guys step in. OCLC’s Local WorldCat was one of the first on the scene offering Web-scale, consolidated indexing of your books, journals, and databases. Just over a year ago, Serials Solutions (a Proquest/CSA company) announced beta sites for Summon, a Web scale discovery service to “quickly search, discover and access reliable and credible library content.”

At heart these and similar products rely on available indexing meta-data mapped to current holdings at the book or article level. You search this index, it returns citations matching your search, and then you link out, through your open-url resolver, to the content.

Done right, this works well; compared to federated search it is outright miraculous. The hard part is making sure the meta-data are complete. This is where the bigger vendors thrive. They own a fair share of available meta-data, either from indexing/abstracting they do in-house or database services they own.

To get all this to work requires mutuality. Mutual users get to use each other’s mutual meta-data. If you wondered why you subscribe to so many databases with so much overlap, now you know. You were waiting to be discovered!

This mutuality is important for everyone. Libraries need one search box access to content. They also need their vendors to index and deliver this content. And the vendors — well, they need more and more of us.

And now EBSCO Publishing shows up with its product, EBSCO Discovery Services. What’s interesting about EDS is that it looks, feels, and acts like EBSCOHost — on adrenalin. This is the Teresa Brewer or Rita Hayworth version of Mutual Admiration Society. Summon and Local WorldCat are sold as extras — alternative versions of library search at your library. You’ve got to maintain database subscriptions one way or the other, or you get, as one vendor puts it, the “thin meta-data.” EDS is sold this way too but it needn’t. It could just be the great interface you get with EBSCOHost products. One day it is just EBSCOHost. The next day you’ve got all this extra stuff.

Soon the market may dictate that these vendors just give you discovery — or face a wild rush out of their aggregated databases. Until then, no matter whom your partner is, success pivots on dancing cheek-to-cheek in the Mutual Admiration Society.

What if there isn’t meta-data? When the music is over (Doors — the End) in the next column…

Towards a search engine for Federal case law?

Your links:
http://www.serialssolutions.com/summon
http://www.oclc.org/worldcatlocal/default.htm
http://www.ebscohost.com/discovery/default.php
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mutual_Admiration_Society_(song)
http://www.librarytechnology.org/discovery.pl?SID=20100118618194580