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Profile-Hilary Davis

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observed that books and the Internet will soon merge, but he questioned whether traditional publishers would be “part of the parade.” He felt that publishers needed to understand the criteria customers use when they consume content. Pinpointing important jobs not being done and unlocking markets by eliminating barriers are also key elements in today’s environment.

Being a gatekeeper trying to define culture will no longer work. In short, rather than trying to apply traditional publishing models to the new networked environment, “what we need to do is apply the networked models to our business.”

He noted that although publishing in this networked environment means lowering barriers to the creation of content, it also “amplifies the return for content providers who can leverage two-way communication and create, refine, and evolve content products around the needs of the readers they serve.”

Brian elaborated on this by saying that publishers should use their content to “build and serve communities of like interest.”

His final admonition was that publishers can “resist the change, buying time and, perhaps, some short-term wins, or they can learn the new rules and prepare for the opportunities inherent in networked publishing.”

The last presentation of the morning was a panel discussion featuring Peter Brantley, Director of the BookServer Project at the Internet Archive; Simon Bell, Head of Strategic Partnerships and Licensing at the British Library; and Michael Gorrell, Executive Vice President of Technology, and Chief Information Officer of EBSCO Publishing. They offered three different perspectives on the topic “Libraries in the 21st Century: Discussion on the Role of Librarians as Curator.” However, there seemed to be one area of agreement. Major libraries will continue to digitize legacy collections. It was also noted that the European Union has a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to make available of-out-of-commerce works including books and learned journals in library collections, thus putting the library front and center in doing the digitization. But enabling all of this will require new business models like the one between the British Library and BiblioLabs that enables access to the Library’s 19th-century book collection.

However, Peter Brantley pointed out that extended collective licensing laws similar to the EU’s are seen as violating fair use in the U.S. and are opposed by the Library Copyright Alliance. Michael Gorrell continued the discussion by noting that there was a definite role for discovery and curation and that EBSCO found itself in the middle between publishers, libraries, and patrons trying to provide content. But Peter Brantley questioned whether we should accept these current roles and later urged libraries to take a more aggressive part in the digital transition.

Simon Bell discussed the British Library and its strategic partnerships, particularly the partnership with BiblioLabs. He also commented on the Finch Report, which authorized open access in the UK, and its impact on publishing scholarly content. Michael Gorrell noted that discoverability is still a problem. He wondered how users will get access to all this content and pointed to the continuing need for more metadata to enable discoverability.

The afternoon lead off with a session entitled “Device Agnostic and Sharing Content Across Platforms” featuring Travis Alber, founder of ReadSocial, and Liza Daly, VP, Engineering at Safari Books Online. One of the first things to emerge was that cross-platform was not that relevant. To quote one of the speakers, “It’s all the Web.”

It was agreed that instituting mobile access is complicated and that making it seamless is still difficult. Liza Daly noted that making user interface simple is key and that “feature creep” was a problem. The building of communities was seen as necessary, but you also needed content. Barriers like DRM only stand in the way.

Richard Nash of Small Demons and Jan Wright, owner of Wright Information Indexing Services, continued the discussion. Richard started by describing Small Demons, a new Web service that collects and catalogs thousands of references to music, movies, people, and objects mentioned inside of books. He noted that they use algorithms to connect hundreds of details inside books and, thus, highlight multiple metadata points within “the world of culture.”

Jan Wright described the far more traditional work of the American Society of Indexing but agreed that there was very much a need for metadata. She pointed out the value of precision using metadata versus mere recall or “search.” She noted the increasing value of detailed indexing that created metadata at the paragraph level to create chunks of information with the possibility of monetizing access.

Traditional publishers received some bad news from Mark Coker of Smashwords and author Larry Downs. First they noted that today’s disruptive technology can destroy traditional industries like publishing. Mark maintained that the economies of publishing were being turned upside down by the advent of eBooks and self-publishing. Before this, publishers had control of the entire process.

continued on page 41