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Technology Left Behind — Social Cataloging and the Library OPAC

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In a recent *American Libraries* article, **Dinah Sanders** discusses “the disconnect between some of the terminology used to describe library materials and the terms used by the community attempting to access them.” She points out that subject headings used in library catalogs are often criticized for their rigidity and single-minded point of view.

An emergent solution to this problem is social cataloging. A combination of social networking and cataloging, the term social cataloging commonly refers to the process by which items are cataloged, bookmarked, or tagged by a group of users in a collaborative process.

Social cataloging in the library world goes by many names; user tagging, social tagging, and social bookmarking are a few. The idea is to involve patrons in the cataloging process to some degree by permitting them to create personal collections of resources and to tag these resources with their own terms. Users have the freedom to assign terms and phrases of their own choosing, rather than relying on a controlled vocabulary. By allowing patrons to assign their own tags to a library resource, we are ensuring that the terms a patron would use to search for that resource are part of an item’s record. In theory, library resources are made more findable by the addition of user tags.

An added benefit of social cataloging is that users have the ability to share both their items and their tags with each other. One user may draw on another user’s bookmarks and tags to expand his or her own library of resources, thus finding resources of which he or she may not have previously been aware.

Social Cataloging Services for Libraries

In her article, **Sanders** goes on to say that “one of the greatest innovations changing the

library discovery experience is the addition of user participation in findability through the use of user-contributed keywords or ‘tags’ associated with particular materials.”

As **Sanders** indicates, the use of social cataloging features and services is a growing trend in libraries. There are a number of options and applications available to libraries interested in incorporating social cataloging into their collections, catalogs, and services. Some options are freely available on the Web, while others involve installing software and are fee-based. Below are some examples of social cataloging applications that libraries are using.

PennTags

A couple of years ago, the **University of Pennsylvania Libraries (Penn)** created **PennTags**, a social bookmarking tool designed specifically for use by members of the **Penn** community. While **PennTags** was built by **Penn** librarians specifically for **Penn** patrons, it serves as a good example of the ways in which libraries are incorporating social cataloging into their own catalogs and customizing their efforts to work specifically for their patrons.

Penn patrons must first log into the system using their university ID. Once they are logged in, adding links to their **PennTags** library is simple. An “Add to **PennTags**” icon appears in the online catalog, the online video catalog, and as part of the menu of the **Penn Libraries’** OpenURL link resolver. The incorporation of **PennTags** into these various discovery tools allows patrons to easily bookmark books, multimedia resources, and journal articles. These bookmarks can also be tagged by the patron with their own terms. In addition to the “Add to **PennTags**” icon, **Penn** created a bookmarklet that integrates with a Web browser, allowing patrons to save the URLs of Web resources in their personal **PennTags** libraries.

By saving all of the links and resources that **Penn** patrons use in their research, **PennTags** “acts as a repository of the varied interests and academic pursuits of the **Penn** community.” (<http://tags.library.upenn.edu/help>)

Delicious

Delicious, often written as **Del.icio.us** (a previ-

ous incarnation of the Website’s name), is a social bookmarking service, designed to let users bookmark and tag their favorite Web resources. Web-based social bookmarking services, like **Delicious**, have the advantage of being accessible from any computer. The site is free to use, but users are required to login with a username and password to use the site. **Delicious** offers bookmarklet applications for several browsers that enable users to save a Website directly from their browser to their **Delicious** library.

While **Delicious** is designed for individual users, libraries are also taking advantage of the service’s capabilities. For example, the **MIT Libraries Virtual Reference** has created a list of **Delicious** bookmarks geared specifically towards **MIT** patrons (<http://delicious.com/virtualref>). Recent additions include the **Urban Dictionary** (<http://www.urbandictionary.com/>) and **National Public Radio** (<http://www.npr.org/>). On their Virtual Reference Webpage **MIT** displays a list of commonly used **Delicious** tags on in the form of a tag cloud (<http://libraries.mit.edu/help/virtualref/cloud.html>). If you click on a tag in the tag cloud, you are taken to a list of the **MIT Delicious** bookmarks that have been tagged with that term.

LibraryThing

LibraryThing is a social cataloging Website specifically geared towards book lovers. The site enables individual users to catalog a personal collection of books and to connect with other users with similar tastes in reading material. When a user adds a book to his or her library, he or she can immediately see how many other **LibraryThing** users have that book, view the tags that are commonly used, and read reviews of the book. In addition, **LibraryThing** will recommend books to read based upon the books in your library and the tags you have used. There are currently over 500,000 users and more than 35 million books in the **LibraryThing** database.

LibraryThing is free for the first 200 books added to your library, but beyond that a paid account is required. Organizational accounts are available for both non-profit and for-profit organizations. The cost of these organizational accounts is quite reasonable, starting at only \$15/year for up to 5,000 books. Some libraries are taking advantage of these organizational accounts. For example, **Cherokee County Public Library** in Gaffney, South Carolina has a library of 950 books on **LibraryThing**, consisting primarily of the adult books that are new to their collection.

LibraryThing for Libraries

In 2007, **LibraryThing** released **LibraryThing for Libraries (LTFL)**, an applica-

continued on page 89

Bowdoin copy.tif — In this record for *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* in the **Bowdoin** OPAC, tags provided by **LibraryThing for Libraries** are can be seen at the bottom of the record.

Technology Left Behind from page 88

tion that incorporates the capabilities and functionality of **LibraryThing** directly into the library OPAC interface. **LTFL** is available for an annual subscription fee; pricing starts at \$1000 and is based upon annual circulation.

LTFL has two primary components: the Catalog Enhancements package and the Reviews Enhancements package. The Catalog Enhancements package includes recommendations, tagging capabilities and tag clouds, and information on alternative editions and translations, while the Reviews Enhancements package is an additional add-on that lets patrons read and write reviews of the items in the catalog.

LTFL is currently being used by both public and academic libraries. **Richland County Public Library (RCPL)** in Columbia, South Carolina implemented the Catalog Enhancements package in its library catalog in August 2007. According to **Amy Grossberg**, the Integrated Library System Administrator at **RCPL**, the installation was quite easy, involving only the addition of a few lines of code to the catalog files. **Grossberg** says that **LTFL** has certainly been worth the cost and that the patron reaction has been positive.

Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine has been using **LTFL** since the Spring of 2007. **Karl Fattig**, Systems & Digital Initiatives Librarian at **Bowdoin**, indicated that **Bowdoin's** primary reason for implementing **LTFL** was to present users with alternate pathways to information discovery. **Fattig** echoes **Grossberg's** sentiments, saying, "LibraryThing for Libraries has been a big hit. We know students are using it, because we get feedback on it. It has absolutely been worth it."

BiblioCommons

BiblioCommons is billed as a social online catalog. According to the company Website, the **BiblioCommons** services are "transforming online library catalogues from searchable inventory systems into engaging social discovery environments." Essentially, the **BiblioCommons** interface layers overtop the library OPAC, providing

a more interactive and community-oriented interface.

Recently **BiblioCommons** launched its first live implementation at the **Oakville Public Library (OPL)** in Ontario, Canada. Patrons that are logged into their account on the **OPL** system may tag library items with their own terms and save items to a personal collection. It is worth poking around the **OPL** catalog to look at the way **BiblioCommons** provides additional user functionality on top of the traditional library catalog capabilities.

Just the Tip of the Iceberg

The options listed above are just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the social cataloging options that are currently available. Several ILS vendors offer systems that incorporate some degree of social cataloging. **Innovative Interfaces** offers **Encore**, a discovery tool which incorporates federated and faceted searching, as well as tag clouds, into the online catalog. **OCLC** recently released a tagging component for **WorldCat.org**, incorporating some social cataloging features into the interface. Also available is **Aquabrowser**, an independent search and discovery platform that can lay overtop an ILS catalog.

In addition, there are Web-based social cataloging services

for more than just books and Web resources. Examples include **Bibster** for scholarly references, **Flixster** for movies, and **Discogs** for music.

Conclusion

Library patrons are accustomed to interactivity, and there is a growing user demand for

input into how items are tagged and made searchable. "LCSH and controlled vocabulary phrase indexing are powerful tools, but they are not the only tools. And, more importantly, they are not the tools to which our new generations of users are accustomed. They know tags, keyword searching, lists of 'If you liked this, you might also like...' — and they are comfortable with the fuzziness of this way of discovering resources," explains **Fattig**. It isn't just that users want these types of features; they expect them.

It is important to remember that social cataloging is a thing that people do, not a tool that people use. There are applications that facilitate social cataloging, but anytime a user tags a resource with their own term that user is participating in social cataloging. As is evident

continued on page 91

LibraryThing
Home | Profile | New Library | Tags | Add books | Ask | Groups | Social

Profile | Recommendations | Reviews | Statistics | Clouds | Gallery | Rooms

Member: cherokee.tif

Library: 930 books — see library
Reviews: 19 reviews — see reviews
Clouds: tag cloud, author cloud
Tags: Mystery (14), suspense (45), series (24), romance (21), families (29), murder (24), thriller (24), christian fiction (37) — see all tags
Genre: Carolina info, Deep South, Librarians who LibraryThing, south carolina libraries

About my library: We are an on-the-small side library who would like to be a part of the on-the-big side tech library world. So we're jumping feet-first into LibraryThing and hoping for the best. Right now, we're mostly adding new(er) books to LibraryThing, and they're mostly about books. We'd love to expand, but with only one librarian adding the books, we're a little limited. We'd love to be more connected with other SC libraries.

An additional note: we have a huge local history / genealogy collection that can't be cataloged here, but please feel free to call or e-mail us with any history or gen questions that you have—we're always happy to help however we can.

We invite comments and reviews from our own patrons and whoever else has a penny's worth of thoughts!

Homepage: <http://www.cherokee-countylibrary.org>
Real name: Cherokee County Public Library
Location: Gainesville, South Carolina
Email: cherokee.tif@info.net
Favorite authors: none specified
Account type: public, non-profit member
Connection News: Connection News
URLs: <http://www.librarything.com/profile/cherokee.tif>
<http://www.librarything.com/catalog/cherokee.tif>
Member since: Dec 8, 2008

cherokee.tif — The Cherokee County Public Library profile on LibraryThing shows commonly used tags, recent additions to the collection, and contact information for CCPL.

MIT Libraries
Ask Us!

Virtual Reference Collection
See these links in delicious

My Delicious Tags
acronyms, almanacs, associations, books, colleges, universities, companies, consumer-info, conversion-factors, dictionaries, directories, diversions, employment, encyclopedias, geography, government, grants, health, internet, law, libraries, news, people, politics, publishing, quotations, sciences, statistics, style, taxes, time-date, travel, weather

MIT Tag cloud.tif — This tag cloud is available via the MIT Libraries' Virtual Reference page. Clicking on one of the tags, takes the user to the list of resources in **Delicious** that have been tagged with that term.

MIT Libraries Virtual Reference's acronyms Bookmarks
Acronyms and Abbreviations Used at MIT

MedLexicon
Acronym Generator
Acronym Finder
Database of acronyms and abbreviations on the web

MITAcronym.tif — Clicking on the term acronym in the MIT Libraries' tag cloud, brings up this list of resources that have been bookmarked with the term "acronym."

I Hear the Train A Comin' from page 90

What follows is a wholly subjective assessment of how fully the institutional repository has lived up to these six initial promises. As a concrete response to the scholarly communication crisis (Promise #1), IRs have had some tangible influence. They have put the university in a proactive stance as it explores ways to lower the costs associated with information dissemination. The IR has pushed publishers to change their policies in relation to the free dissemination of at least some version of a published article (typically a postprint). The institutional repository has also proven to be a viable home for the monograph, the edited volume, and other niche publications. While the IR has not conclusively ended the scholarly communication crisis, it certainly has helped to mitigate some of the more troublesome aspects of it.

In terms of expanded access to scholarly information (Promise #2), institutional repositories have had mixed success. On the plus side, IRs have delivered eyeballs to the literature. **Bepress's ResearchNow** database, a sort of meta-repository site that allows searching across the 70 or so **Digital Commons** installations, has logged 10 million full-text downloads in the last 365 days. The vast majority of these are for working papers and other non-journal content. IRs have simply made this type of content more easily discoverable. Also on the plus side, these materials are substantially more likely to be locatable and accessible in five or ten years' time when compared to the old tangle of personal and departmental Web pages. Librarians care a lot more about curating and archiving than any other stakeholder, and their oversight of the repository provides a healthy guarantee that IR deposits will not be 404'd someday soon.

Now the negative. One of the big hopes of the IR — that it could be a mechanism to categorically collect, organize, and disseminate data sets, multimedia files, executables and other non-static information — has not been realized in any substantive way. It is undoubtedly true that we have seen some interesting experiments along these lines, but the IR has not rendered the dissemination of non-static materials a commonplace occurrence. The institutional repository has made this technically possible, but has thus far failed to make much progress beyond that.

Institutional repositories have done a fair job of highlighting the depth and breadth of the institution's intellectual output (Promise #3). Many schools have placed special emphasis within their repositories on specific subjects or programs where they excel. The IR has proven to be a good central depository for collecting disparate materials that emphasize a school's leadership in a certain subject. Examples include **Boston College's Church in the 21st Century Series** and **Cornell's Industrial & Labor Relations Collection**. On the down side, I am not aware of many, if any, instances where an institution has coordinated its IR activities with an alumni association or a fundraising drive or a central campus PR

campaign. The institutional repository may be a treasure trove of valuable information demonstrating leadership and innovation in specific discipline, but it is unclear to me if anything is being done to systematically leverage this golden asset. The IR has potential as a marketing tool, but I don't believe that potential has been anywhere close to fully realized as yet.

One of the undeniable successes of the institutional repository has been in furthering the "information wants to be free" agenda (Promise #4). There is simply a lot more content that is more readily available than there was in 2002. The **OAIster** database contains nearly 20 million records at this point. Not all of them are IR materials, but a lot of them are. Institutional repositories have helped create an expectation among researchers, particularly younger ones, that some form of the materials they seek may be freely accessible to them with a modest amount of Web exploration. I suspect this will be one of the more lasting impacts of IR on the scholarly communication realm.

The IR has in many cases lowered the barriers to the launch of new e-journals (Promise #5). **Digital Commons**, for example, has been used to produce close to 150 open access e-journals. That is an impressive number, roughly on par with the number of titles **Hindawi** publishes. However, the reduction in cost and effort it takes to start a journal is not all to the good. It encourages vanity publications, half-hearted endeavors, and other projects that are likely to add clutter rather than clarity to the scholarly communication picture. In addition, many IR-driven journal launches

seem to have taken place in a vacuum. There has been little coordination with other campus units, including but not limited to the university press. The result is that we see random buds sprouting across the scholarly terrain as opposed to a well-tended and planned garden.

The institutional repository has been a disappointment in terms of the adoption costs for authors (Promise #6). The software has indeed proven relatively simple to use. Posting does only take a few minutes, as the advocates had promised. However, scholars have by and large been unconvinced that the effort of posting is outweighed by the benefits of wider dissemination, long-term accessibility, and so forth. Content acquisition has been a slog. This has forced the library to be more creative and aggressive in its marketing efforts, a task for which the library is not ideally suited.

So this is how I see the IR world reflected in the rear view mirror. We have done some things well and missed the mark in other areas. In next issue's column, I will address the key benefits institutions can recognize via a successful repository, as well as the possible impediments to a successful IR that institutions must face. I'll also look at the future of institutional repositories within the larger context of a rapidly changing scholarly communication landscape. Stay tuned. 🌸

Technology Left Behind from page 89

by some of the resources highlighted above, it is not always necessary to spend a lot of money to meet the user's need. The important part is to meet the need.

Web Resources

Aquabrowser — <http://www.aquabrowser.com/>
Bibster — <http://bibster.semanticweb.org/>
BiblioCommons — <http://www.bibliocommons.com/>
Cherokee County Public Library on LibraryThing — <http://www.librarything.com/profile/cherokeelibrary>
Delicious — <http://delicious.com/>
Discogs — <http://www.discogs.com/>
Flixster — <http://www.flixster.com/>
LibraryThing — <http://www.librarything.com/>
Oakville Public Library — <http://www.opl.on.ca/>
PennTags — <http://tags.library.upenn.edu/>
WorldCat — <http://www.worldcat.org/>

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