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Issues in Vendor/Library Relations -- The Data Train: Can We Share the Track?

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els, all read before I was 21 years old, would probably be tough going for me now even if I had never read them. But they were important books and I wonder about them even today and have a one-volume edition of **James T. Farrell's** masterpiece sitting on my nightstand waiting for me to get to it.

Just recently, I read two novels that I can imagine re-reading one day, *The Mosquito Coast* (**Paul Theroux**) and *The Poisonwood Bible* (**Barbara Kingsolver**). They just happen to have the same themes although I didn't know it until I had read one and, coincidentally, begun the other in short order.

In fact, I could find at least two books for each year's reading that could easily end up on someone's "greatest books" list. What's more,

I could give a reason or two for why I think my books are worth reading. But I recognize that what ends up being taught and being listed is the result of the times we live in and the prejudices and predilections we have acquired through education and experience.

There's another problem with anointing one's favorites with the title of "world's greatest," and that is the problem of comprehensiveness. Who among us has read all of the worthwhile books of last century or even this century? Would a book we did not like or could not finish forty years ago be accessible and even influential today? Of course it could. Maybe I'll try the *Forsythe Saga* again and remember the time in January 1966 when I tossed my paperback copy into the New York Harbor along with a pair of Army combat boots (I was getting out and it felt good). And of course no one can be comprehensive and neither can one be objective when it comes to reading books, fiction or non-fiction.

I will grant that **Professor Bloom** and all the other readers with doctorates in literature, have analyzed what they have read far more than I have or care to, but I will not grant that their favorite works (not necessarily those on their "great" or "syllabi" lists) bring them more pleasure than mine do or that theirs would necessarily win more readers or fans than my list or that are necessarily of greater merit no matter what the measure.

There is no way to prove my points but I can at least praise some of the books and authors that have meant a lot to me over the years and that are still part of who I am and so in future columns, I intend to pay tribute to writers who have enriched my life, have made me think beyond my own small world, and who have let me go on adventures, albeit vicariously, that I could not afford or would not dare on my own. 🍷

Issues in Vendor/Library Relations — The Data Train: Can We Share the Track?

by **Robin Champieux** (Director of Sales and Customer Experience, Blackwell) <Robin.Champieux@Blackwell.com>

Column Editor: **Bob Nardini** (Group Director, Client Integration and Head Bibliographer, Coutts Information Services) <bnardini@couttsinfo.com>

At the **2008 Charleston Conference**, **Paul Lightcap**, Head of Monographs at the **University of Florida**, and I moderated a Lively Lunch, "*The Data Train: Can We Share the Track?*", where we explored the possible implications and opportunities presented in *On the Record: The Library of Congress Working Group Report on the Future of Bibliographic Control* (2008). We specifically wanted to discuss its call for increased collaboration among everyone involved in the process of creating, collecting, and maintaining bibliographic data. We engaged a panel of those groups — vendors, libraries, and publishers — to explore how we as a community might extend our collaborative work while protecting and positively redefining the interests of each party, including user needs, profit, data standardization, and accuracy. Participants shared with us new and imagined business models that could grow from the maximization of bibliographic data along the supply chain. In this short article, I will present some ideas from the vendor perspective.

Approval book vendors create surrogates of content to enable automatic and mediated selection. Experienced, well-educated staff, many with advanced degrees, create nearly all of the metadata we produce. The timeliness and accuracy of our work is critical to our credibility and the efficiencies and cost-savings we deliver to our customers. This work is largely manual, always expensive, and often slow to change. We create metadata that is new and valuable, but we regularly reproduce, not recycle, metadata our publisher partners, commercial entities, and libraries have previously created. Moreover, the new and valuable meta-

data we create does not travel down the supply chain to be made available to end users.

Description is king in the approval book business. I do not think this need will decrease over time, but there will be an increased emphasis on human-driven, intellectual, qualitative description to enhance computer-driven description and discovery. Under our current business models, it will be difficult to meet this need. We cannot support this work in addition to the metadata we are currently creating using existing workflows. Vendors will have to increase usage of metadata provided by publishers and networked resources rather than reproducing this information. We will need to identify the metadata we produce that automated, computer-based processes can create more quickly and more accurately. As a result, we can devote more people and capital to human-driven, intellectual bibliographic control.

For example, **Blackwell** is in the process of launching a new version of our selection and acquisitions database, **Collection Manager**. The new interface reflects some FRBR group one entity relationships, which we manage in our internal bibliographic database. We believe this will allow our users to find and select the content they are after far more easily. Nevertheless, we know we have only skimmed the surface. Conversations among colleagues, competitors, and librarians about the possibilities of expressing the fuller complex of FRBR relationships in vendor interfaces and even approval profiling "rules" have been

stimulating for everyone. **William Denton** and **Jodi Schneider** gave a talk at **Code4Lib 2009** which compared how vendors currently talk about and use FRBR to **William's** and **Jodi's** meaning of FRBR: "When vendors talk about FRBRization they usually mean grouping manifestations into works. When we talk about FRBR, we mean something far richer and rewarding."¹

It is this "far richer and rewarding" stuff that I find so interesting, but most important to vendors is not the ability to display strong FRBR relationships in our interfaces, but rather the tools and services we can provide that will rest on this architecture. My colleague **Eric**

Redman envisions the ability to display content in the context of other "like" information objects. System users might create collections around specific purposes, which would then become the context for the information objects within these collections. A sense of trust could be derived from an object's inclusion in a collection or collections. However, to move in this direction and build the tools made possible by deeper description of content, vendors will need

to heed the calls of the Working Group, by taking fuller advantage of the metadata others create, by engaging with partners to ensure fuller standardization and better quality control for the data we receive, such as publisher **ONIX** feeds, and by spending more time on the creation of unique metadata.

Sharing. This subject and its possibili-

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ties reveal the vendor geek in me, a badge I am happy to wear. Approval vendors create valuable, original metadata, but we normally isolate this information. Often it does not travel past our proprietary end-points — **Collection Manager**, **GOBI**, **OASIS**, etc... When we deliver this data in vendor-created provisional records and enhanced cataloging records, its use is largely limited to acquisitions processes. Additionally, we store transactional data and user activity data to facilitate business with the vendor, but individuals and institutions could share this data. I believe we need to explore how this information can be utilized in other environments. This complex topic requires vendors to engage in community discussions about metadata standards and carriers, viable business models, and issues of personal and institutional privacy, to name a few. Nevertheless, vendors could make valuable contributions to **Web 2.0** information tools and bibliographic databases beyond the acquisitions functions of our data facilitates. There are opportunities for delivering and exchanging more information directly with libraries, cataloging agencies, and union catalogs

to facilitate more robust social discovery tools. Vendors classify content using taxonomies of non-subject parameters, for example. We describe the content level, the type of book, and the nature of the publisher, to name a few. Metadata about an information object's inclusion within a collection, as described above, would also help end users evaluate content. I think, for example, of products such as **LibraryThing** and **LibraryThing for Libraries**, which we could enhance with such vendor tags, selector and institutional recommendations, and purchasing activity. Meaningful data such as circulation statistics could also flow back to the vendor from libraries and end users.

The **Library of Congress** has endorsed the majority of the Working Group's recommendations and has begun work to move some of them forward. This is exciting and risky for approval book vendors, in that what we do is built on inefficiencies along the supply chain. We are reliant on the **Library of Congress's** current **MaRC** production model, and we produce valuable metadata that does not travel down the supply chain to library users and other information seekers. As the library community cooperates to evaluate the Working Group's recommendations and achieve desired outcomes, approval vendors will need to par-

ticipate actively and thoughtfully. We must take part in evidence gathering projects, such as the **Library of Congress** and **R2's** work to map bibliographic record creation and distribution. We will have to evaluate and evolve what we do to ensure our services are not redundant, but offer added value. The evolution of content, description, selection, and access presents opportunities for approval vendors to offer new benefits to our customers and community while improving internal workflows. *On the Record* emphasizes collaboration, decentralization, and the greater use of data along the supply chain. As vendors, I hope we will review what we contribute that is new and valuable, expand these contributions, harness increasingly efficient methods for receiving and delivering the descriptive metadata important to our services and customers, and experiment with sharing our data in new environments and new applications. 🌱

Endnotes

1. **Denton, William**. "What we talk about when we talk about FRBR." [Weblog entry.] *The FRBR Blog*. York University. 6 March 2009. (<http://www.frbr.org/2009/03/06/what-we-talk-about>). 7 March 2008.

Drinking From The Firehose — Fun With Facebook

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Social networking sites such as **Facebook**, **MySpace**, **Orkut** and **LinkedIn** are all the rage these days. I enjoy this type of interaction although it's important to find a niche and stick with it. We cannot all be active on all these sites, nor would we want to be.

Those of us who work in academia can find plenty of kindred spirits on both **Facebook** and **LinkedIn**. I have professional colleagues, however, who are not ready to take the plunge. There are a variety of reasons for this sentiment. Some people are worried about the invasion of their privacy. Others are not interested in this sort of interaction online, just on principle. One big difference between a social networking "interaction" and the kind you experience with email or texting, is that most of the time the social network post goes to all your "friends" at the same time. Or that is what people assume. It doesn't have to be that way. There are a number of ways to close yourself off if you wish. Many people use their **Facebook** accounts as though it were email. It's up to you how you want to use it.

All these different types of ways of communicating are getting a little hard to manage for some people. It is completely understandable that there might be some doubts or paranoia about how this works.

There are a couple of key issues to think about. One is this: Is your life an

open book? Do you have reasons to care what people know about you? If you have issues with this concept, social networking may not be for you. For numerous reasons, you might want to lay low. Or, if you do decide to sign up, be choosy about those you allow into your circle of "friends."

I have "friended" a number of people with whom I work. Some of these folks, frankly, are not, in "real life" people I hang out with in any way. Some of them I hardly know. But I have allowed them into my **Facebook** page anyway. This includes an administrator above me and several of my direct and indirect reports. My Library Dean and one of my favorite AD colleagues have both decided to keep their **Facebook** pages closed to just family and personal friends. That's OK, I can respect that choice. The couple who rents our house back in Boone for example, are not "friends" since they use **Facebook** for professional connections to their students in a very directed fashion. It makes sense that they don't want to be "friends" with their landlords.

I have discovered old friends from high school and even elementary school on **Facebook**. That's been interesting, and fun. I did use **Classmates.com** and other reunion sites for awhile but they have an annoying tendency to want to

charge you a fee when you're not looking so I have pulled out of those sites.

I am not much into "**MySpace**" because I don't think it caters to my age group or tastes, although I do use it to follow a favorite music group.

I've never used **Google's Orkut** and **LinkedIn** seems to lack any real fun to it — it's kind of dry. Of course, some of the features in **Facebook** are just silly and I ignore them. But what's the harm in sending people "Good karma?"

There are lots of librarians on **Facebook**, and perhaps that is because so many of us work in academia and so we want to be where the students are. **Facebook** started at **Harvard**, so it reflects the university culture. Students typically are not thinking very seriously about what they put out there. This has been a controversy for some time, but as students mature and start realizing that their **Facebook** pages might not reflect positively on them, they make changes to their profiles. This is especially true close to graduation — it has become a rite of passage for seniors to take down the fluff stuff in preparation for the job hunt — you don't want perspective employers to be viewing your spring break antics!

There are people on **Facebook** whose goal, it seems, is to have as many friends as possible. If that's their desire, so be it, but I will not accept you as a friend just because you are collecting them. I received a couple of friend requests from people who seemed to be in collector

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