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I Google, You Google, We Google...

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Photo by Lois Tema.

I Google, You Google, We Google . . .

by **Aline Soules** (Cal State East Bay) <aline.soules@csueastbay.edu>

Perhaps you remember the **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow** poem that describes a little girl: “When she was good, she was very good indeed, but when she was bad, she was horrid.”¹ I often feel the same way about **Google**. I love it and use it as often as the next person, but, occasionally, I have misgivings about the implications for our educational system, our libraries, and our future.

The Goal of Google

Google’s mission may be “to organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful,”² but **Google’s** success depends on the pursuit of profit for shareholders. Easy searching and minimal frustration help to entice people to click on ads which garner revenue. **Larry Page** and **Sergey Brin**, **Google’s** founders, were featured on the cover of *Fortune* magazine’s December 13, 2004 issue, along with the heading “**Google**: Is this company worth \$165 a share?” The article focused on the rise of the stock in the four months since the IPO had been issued.³ “They’ve created the first new and effective ad medium in 50 years,” [said] consultant **Seth Godin**. “It’s brilliant.”⁴ No mention of **Google’s** mission, just profit. I checked on **Google’s** closing price on the first day of trading (August 18, 2004, \$100.34) and on December 13, 2007, exactly three years after this article appeared (\$674.05). The stock has topped \$700 at times.⁵ In addition, no matter how much **Microsoft** or **Yahoo!** (or their combined forces, if one purchases the other) struggle to catch up and surpass **Google**, there are no current signs of their doing so.

Google’s interests extend beyond content. According to **Michael Wolff**, “it’s the age of the media gadget,”⁶ such as the **Google phone**, currently in development. According to **Wolff’s** sources, **Google** “may even give the phone to you. It wants to get rid of all the rules. It really wants to go for anarchy. Of course, this is an anarchic world that **Google** will control.”⁷

Google now “accounts for just over sixty per cent of the world’s Internet searches, and its power comes from the data it collects from all those searches.”⁸ As a result, **Google’s** competitors are uneasy and **Google** is paying more attention to them and to the political arena. There have been lawsuits (**Viacom** sued **Google** in March, 2007 for copyright infringement) and complaints by consumer activists that have drawn attention from politicians, e.g., **Senators Orrin Hatch** (R-UT) and **Herb Kohl** (D-WI). In November, 2007, these Senators “asked the **Federal Trade Commission** to examine the competition questions raised by the acquisition of the Internet advertising company **DoubleClick** by **Google**.”⁹ As a result, **Google** is increasing its presence in Washington, D.C. and will likely be as successful in lobbying as in everything else.

In the Classroom

To go with **Google’s** growing power is our own growing dependency, which is confirmed in my classroom. Among other duties at **Cal State East Bay**, my colleagues and I teach a two-credit information literacy course required of all incoming first year students. My class consists of an amazing range of students. They vary by ethnicity, country of birth, preparation level, major, etc. They have one thing in common, though: they are digital natives. This, however, does not guarantee that they are digitally savvy. In fact, many are quite the opposite. They can point and click, but they lack skills in searching or in evaluating what they find. And it’s not because they aren’t bright or lively or interested in their subjects. It’s their preparation, their assumptions in this new information world, and the omnipresent **Google** and its ilk.

I can show students databases, the catalog, and other sources on and off the Web, but left on their own, they return to **Google**. Many students prefer to avoid dealing with complex databases, complex strategies, or complex scholarly articles and do so only when required by their instructors. They don’t have the time or the inclination — besides, it’s harder. Many of them cope with work, school, and family obligations. Of course, there are some who like the library resources, but for most, it takes a lot of convincing. When it comes to choosing a search engine, **Google** comes first.

My opening approach is to start where they are most familiar. “How many of you use **Google**?” Up go the hands, including my own. **Beyond that, I discover what many of them don’t know:**

- The meaning and purpose of http and html, a domain name, URL construction, and the existence of suffixes beyond .com, .org, .net, or .edu (even though they may have visited such sites)
- That you can influence search results through the use of quotation marks, truncation, and other devices
- That in addition to **Google** and a couple of its competitors which they know, there are other commercial search engines, and there are also non-commercial search engines that can provide some vetted results
- That in addition to **Google** and, sometimes, **iGoogle**, there are **Google Books**, **Google Scholar**, etc.

And this is before we get to concepts such as:

- The Internet is not the Web
- A search engine is not a database

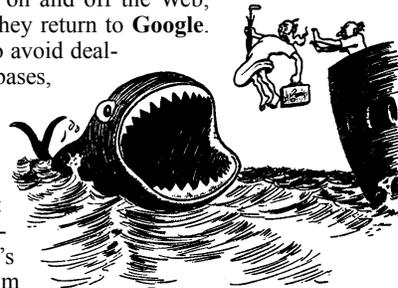
- **Google Scholar** results don’t come from the Web; depending on set preferences, they come from **Open WorldCat** and our **Cal State East Bay** holdings
- While **Google Scholar** is a search engine, like its mother ship, it acts as a platform in a manner similar to those of our commercial vendors
- A platform is not a database
- Content is not the same as its delivery mechanism
- Content can be retrieved from our database through various delivery mechanisms — the database itself, other databases, federated searching, **Google Scholar**, commercial platforms, and even, print materials

Beyond these concepts is the issue of evaluation. In one exercise, I ask them to compare newspapers’ Websites. We discuss bias, ownership history, what each paper chooses to place “above the fold” (an interesting absorption of a print term into the Web environment), and other features. I also show them sites such as **www.factcheck.org**. Students easily click from **Google** results to Web pages, but are surprised at the differences on these news sites and need guidance in evaluating those differences and the reasons for them.

Google is also an interesting way to initiate discussions about information ethics — copyright, privacy, etc. Copyright, not surprisingly, is a mystery to them. For them privacy is irrelevant, unless they are computing majors or have personal experience with an invasion of privacy. They have grown up with a very different perspective on this topic. When I describe the use of cookies and mention that **Google** keeps their search queries for eighteen months, their response is “So?” Yet, according to a **Google** executive who didn’t want to be identified for a *New Yorker* article, “Privacy is an atomic bomb...Our success is based on trust.”¹⁰ **Google** understands this, whether from the principle of privacy or the potential of liability, but my students need an explanation.

All of these elements come into play with **Google** and I use it as a jumping off point to try to convey these and other concepts. By the end of the quarter, some of them understand that **Google** has its place, but that other information sources, delivery mechanisms, and strategies are helpful, at least while they are in university and have access. Some of them, however, will always prefer **Google**. The lure is hard to resist and, ultimately, when they will be cut off from our commercial databases after graduation, **Google** may give them one of the

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few free access points to information. If they take nothing else away from my class, evaluation is the element I wish them to remember because they can use that skill in any information environment.

I only spend one lesson of my ten-week quarter directly on **Google** and the Web, although we use it throughout the quarter. I also show them some Web 2.0 tools, for example, but for students, it's all the same thing — a bunch of stuff on the Web, alias **Google**. Just as they don't know or care about the difference between the Internet and the Web, they think of everything as **Google** or **Google**-related. **Google** is the latest in a line of brand names that have become household words — **Kleenex**, **Xerox**, **Google** — turned effectively into both a noun and a verb.

Implications for Collection Development

Our libraries went through a transformation with the shift from buying materials to renting them and becoming dependent on commercial vendors. The trend continued with eBooks. Now, we're looking at a new transformation driven by multiple factors that include search engines and the way the new generation gathers information. Yet, we still spend a great deal of time acquiring information and building collections in relatively traditional ways.

Due to our limited budgets, we evaluate what **Google** can offer directly or indirectly through its search engine. But do we correlate this information sufficiently with our traditional collection model? We have long debated issues such as own vs. rent, print vs. online, format choices for multiple learning styles, etc, but we need to encompass and make sense of the range of information now available and we need to do so in a much more timely manner.

Conversely, what do we need to keep? It costs to keep — maintenance, space. Do we throw out our print **Austen**? **Dickens**? **Emerson**? Do we ditch **Thomas Hardy** or **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow**? The answer depends on our institutional missions, but this decision, too, requires a more timely approach (just think of our **JSTOR** backfile debates).

We also need to factor reading patterns into our collection acquisitions and weeding decisions. If students tend to read only what is required, what difference do acquisition and weeding of traditional formats make to holdings or to reading itself? Data in the **NEA** report, *To Read or Not To Read: A Question of National Consequence*, show that reading is on the decline.¹¹ **Michael Cart**, in *American Libraries*, presented a different perspective by suggesting that “not everyone is convinced the reading sky is falling.”¹² **Cart** quoted young adult author and editor **Marc Aronson** and **YALSA** Past President **Pam Spencer Holley**.

Aronson: “I do not see a crisis in reading ... but, rather, a problem on the part of adults who idealize a certain kind of

fiction reading and have trouble making sense of the mixture of fiction, digital information, nonfiction, and assigned reading that make up the diet of the YA reader.” **Holley**: “It depends on what you consider ‘reading.’”¹³

Regardless, will the possibility of a library or a home with reduced or minimal tactile print hasten the transformation process? Will people give up reading for other delivery formats like **Google's YouTube**? Use the latest hand-held devices to carry their information with them? Or access their remotely stored information from wherever they roam? This shift will be facilitated as reading shifts to smaller and smaller “bites” designed to accommodate our busier lives, smaller screens, and more fractured attention spans.

For years, course packs have compiled single book chapters or select articles. Now, **Barnes & Noble** is testing sales by the chapter.¹⁴ For my students, this “less is best” approach makes sense. Many of them take so long to read an article that they give up. If I assign a reading, I choose something short or just a key portion of an article rather than an entire piece. I have been criticized for this “dumbing down,” but I would rather they read an excerpt than skip a full article they find overwhelming.

Yet, in libraries, we continue to buy whole books in print or e-format. How can we justify this in the face of these new reading trends? Would it be better to admit that **Google** has taken over dealing with retrospective whole books? **Google** is making available entire public domain titles and fairly large portions of in-copyright titles with, of course, the opportunity to click to buy in the case of current works. Should our collection strategy be more focused on discovering which pieces of works will be read, so that we can acquire just those portions? Do we need to accept this new reading reality?

Consider the principle of a “well-rounded” collection that supports the curriculum or, for a research institution, the research agenda. With shrinking budgets, how well are we really doing that? With the majority of students reading “only when required,” can we continue to justify this ideal even if we could afford it? If **Google** will eventually digitize print books (the millionth from the **University of Michigan** having recently been celebrated) and make available large portions of titles still in copyright, what is our “collection” role? For researchers, when a complete work is needed, we could either use a traditional purchasing model or perhaps share payment through the researcher's grant in the same manner as author fees are now paid, making the title available throughout the institution.

There are other issues. Should we seek perpetual access, for example, if the life span of most items is shrinking? Should we seek perpetual access only for key parts that the bulk of our students will use? What about long-term preservation? The need may be critical, but should we leave it to **Google**? For many of our students, there are only a few key information items that “repeat.” The rest are “once only.”

Other factors that are highlighted through classroom experience are multiple formats for different learning styles and **ADA** compliance, and the growth in online delivery (my own course section will go online or be “hybrid” in fall 2008). These all suggest new collection principles and practices. What is a library today? A “collection” or an “access portal”? As we rely more and more on **Google**, we must update and refine how we present the information we gather. This speaks to our role as information organizers rather than collection developers. How will we manage the new organized chaos, where each individual crafts his/her personal **Google**, blog, wiki, **Face Book/MySpace**, **YouTube**, creating multiple organizational structures for the information that's available?

Should organizing information as we have done still be our goal? This year, each of my students has submitted work through an individual blog, requiring them to create a gmail account.¹⁵ Many handcraft their blogs, not just in look and feel, but also in content, creating links, pulling in information, organizing it. My students are becoming their own collection developers. As this individuation grows, the library will be just one “collection” point among many. The issues surrounding organizing information have been under consideration by the **Library of Congress' Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control**¹⁶ and the final report challenges a number of our long-standing assumptions. Further, at one of their open meetings held at **Google** headquarters, there was a presentation by **Timothy Burke** of **North Carolina State University** about **NCSU's** decision to use **Endeca** with their catalog, a decision based on their research that showed which few elements are searched by most users.¹⁷ My experience with my own students provides anecdotal confirmation of this, but **NCSU's** work is a good reminder of our need for more formal data on what our students are doing.

Conclusion

I am deeply committed to my students. They are bright, interesting, and hard-working. Many face heavy workloads and adult responsibilities that are ever-escalating and more pressure-laden than was the case for previous generations of students. Many also face financial challenges. Yet, they struggle, learn, and earn degrees. But when it comes to information literacy, how many students can my teaching colleagues and I really reach? And what happens after they graduate and lose their access to databases, eBooks, etc.? What happens when they can't afford to pay for each piece of information and may be working in an environment that can't or won't meet the costs? If their future access is primarily through **Google**, what does that say about our long-standing collection development practices? Our reality is that we need **Google**, whether or not we always like it. In his article in the *New Yorker*, **Auletta** quoted **Martin Sorrell**, CEO of the **WPP Group**, one of the world's largest communications services groups. **Sorrell** “claimed that his company is **Google's** largest advertising-agency customer” and “calls

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Google a ‘frenemy.’¹⁸ For me, that word describes Google perfectly. 

Using Google in Technical Services: An Unscientific Survey

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Endnotes

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13. Ibid.
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15. As a side note, our university has just switched all students to an email system powered by Google.
16. Library of Congress. *Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control*. <http://www.loc.gov/bibliographic-future/> (accessed February 24, 2008). On this site is a link to their final report.
17. Burke, Timothy. “Research Using Library Catalogs.” *Users and Uses of Bibliographic Data*. Public meeting of the Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control, held on March 8, 2007. <http://www.loc.gov/bibliographic-future/meetings/> (accessed February 24, 2008). Links to the invitation, the agenda, the background paper, and the summary. A PowerPoint of this presentation can also be seen at <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/staff/kaan-telm/LibraryOnePointOne.ppt>.
18. Auletta, op. cit.: 33.

Public Services librarians use Google daily. But how many Technical Services (TS) librarians use Google, and, more importantly, how do they use it? In a recent search of the current literature, I was able to find only two citations which addressed this question: Jennifer Lang, “Have You Searched Google Yet?” Using Google as a Discovery Tool for Cataloging,” in *Library Philosophy & Practice*, Summer 2007, Vol. 9, Issue 3, p.1-10, and Jin Qiang, “Creating Up-to-Date Corporate Name Authority Records by Using Official Corporate Home Web Pages,” in *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, 2004, vol. 38, Issue 3/4, p.281-290. I often use Google in my cataloging work, as do some of my colleagues. I know that using Google has changed the way we do our jobs. I was curious to explore how our jobs have changed, because of Google, and the many ways in which librarians and other library staff in Technical Services use Google to inform and verify their work. I hoped I would learn how I could improve my own skills. I use the phrase “Technical Services” to include acquisitions, serials, cataloging and database maintenance.



I decided to conduct an informal survey. In February 2008, I posted the following query to five discussion lists, “For an article I am writing for *Against the Grain*, I would like the following information: If you are a librarian or library staff member working in a Technical Services position (i.e., database maintenance, cataloging,

acquisitions, serials), do you use Google in your daily work? If so, how? (Please be specific.)” Specifically, I sent this request to SERIALST (Serials in Libraries Discussion Forum), AUTOCAT (discussion list on library cataloging and authorities), LEZBRIAN (Lesbian and Bisexual Library Workers), SUNYLA-L (topics relating to the SUNY Librarians Association or SUNY Libraries) and SLAVLIBS (Forum for Slavic Librarians). I chose those discussion lists because I subscribe to all of them. I received over 150 responses. I expected to find that most catalogers who use Google used it for name/subject authority verification, as well as for classification purposes. I also expected publisher verification to be a very popular usage of Google, by acquisitions folks. Frequent use of Google to verify live URLs was something else I expected.

I received answers from people working in all sorts of libraries: academic, private, school, public, art, music, law, scientific, church, federal, medical, military, etc., and a few answers came from book vendors. Most of the responses came from North America, and there were a few from other parts of the world, as well. I was surprised at the variety of answers I received. (I should probably have been more specific and asked how people use the Google Search Engine in particular, as some people told me how they use other Google products. More on that later.) Most respond-

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The Acquisitions Category:
Finding small-press Websites
Finding out currency exchanges
Subscription information; chronology; format change
To determine latest editions of titles
To determine release dates, especially for best sellers
To find alternate vendors
To find license agreement terms
To find non-book vendors (i.e., specialty film distributors)
To find open access journals
To find publishers Websites, to check frequency information
To find staff members’ names (on a journal Website) so that I can speak to an actual person and get an answer!
To find state agency field offices
To locate and price media
To search book values
To search for out-of-print material
Vendor: addresses, price, ordering information, phone number; saves money on long distance phone