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Inside Pandora's Box-Managing a Web Site Needs a Few Good Tools

Haiwang Yuan

Western Kentucky University Libraries, haiwang.yuan@wkyu.edu

Jack G. Montgomery

Western Kentucky University Libraries, jack.montgomery@wkyu.edu

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Inside Pandora's Box — Managing a Web Site Needs a Few Good Tools

Column Editor: **Jack G.**

Montgomery (Collection Services Coordinator, Western Kentucky University Libraries)

<Jack.Montgomery@wku.edu>

by **Haiwang Yuan** (Assistant Professor and Web Site & Virtual Library Coordinator, Western Kentucky University Libraries &

Museum, 1 Big Red Way, Bowling Green KY 42101, ph: 270-745-5084; fax: 270-745-6422)

<haiwang.yuan@wku.edu>

Among the many responsibilities of a Website coordinator, one finds that the development of a library Web site is only a portion of the management issues involved. Maintaining and keeping it up-to-date could be a costly, ongoing process. It is particularly true with large sites that have hundreds, or even thousands, of internal and external links. Even full-time Web developers could be overwhelmed by the continued volatility of the Web world, where links come and go with or without notice.

Some of the difficulties involved in managing a Web site could, however, be alleviated by the selection and application of a few good Web tools. The value of these tools has been illustrated by my experience of developing and managing the Western Kentucky University Libraries & Museum Web site. Within only a few months, each of its thousand pages received a face-lift. In addition, a thirty-eight page "Topper InfoPortal" (TIP) — a potential model for libraries to become "first portals of choice" — was also completed. At the time this article is being written, both sites had been kept free of bad links, thanks to a slew of Web development software and services.

Of all the Web tools, Macromedia's Dreamweaver is at the top of the list. Its round-trip HTML authoring interface is like a car with both a shift and an automatic gear, satisfying the savvy as well as the novice Web weavers, and it can be switched back and forth. Its drag and drop design feature proves to be a time saver. The formally complex process of laying out convoluted table after table now becomes a simple matter. Dreamweaver's templates allow instantaneous and simultaneous modifications to be made to multiple pages within seconds. Developing a site using templates can also produce non-frame pages with the effect of frames: keeping navigational mechanism available on every page while page contents change. Together with the template, on which one can designate editable and non-editable areas, Dreamweaver's "Check In/Out" function allows you the power to delegate tasks to others while maintaining control and security.

Atomz.com is another good tool. An online service that provides search engine capabilities to Web sites, it keeps you away from hardware and software installation and configuration hassles. The service is free unless a site has five hundred or more pages. Atomz.com Search not only facilitates patrons' searches for information on one's library Web site, but also helps you maintain your sites. Search results report

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the key words that patrons used to search the site and can be used as valuable feedback for site improvement. One can also benefit from the link error reports — generated in the process of having the site indexed by the Atomz.com Search — so that you know from which page to find the broken links and fix them. Again, with Dreamweaver, locating reported bad links is as easy as finding a word on a word processor.

If one wants the link-checking process automated, LinkAlarm and NetMechanics work equally well, except that the "mechanic" is a bit "quick-tempered" - timing out immaturely as it checks the links so that some of the reported broken links may not necessarily be broken. It is still better than missing something.

If Dreamweaver checks internal links at the development stage and Atomz.com checks them each time it indexes the site, then LinkAlarm or NetMechanics will keep a constant eye on both internal and external links. They are doing it independent of your routine at your computer. You need only to submit a URL of a site or a directory that needs to be checked. When the checking is done, a notice will be sent to your e-mail with the URL to the service provider's site that displays the results detailing which link from which page is broken.

If you wish to announce an event or to debut a new page, you may want to enhance the advertisement with some animation. GIF Movie Gear is a simple but user-friendly and powerful tool. To create more sophisticated animations, one needs to use Macromedia's Flash, which is good at creating interactive movies for the Web. Used together with PhotoShop and GIF Movie Gear, you can create catchy but less annoying animated buttons and icons because they do not call for plug-ins. What's more, both GIF Movie Gear and Flash can produce maximized GIF animations, that is, only the color of an animated section of the image is saved to reduce file

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Biz of Acq — Book & Serial Industry Mergers: Effects on Libraries

by **Nancy Markle Stanley** (Head, Acquisitions Service, University Libraries, Penn State University) <nms2@psu.edu>

The library supplier business and services have changed significantly over the last ten years and the rate of change over the past five year has profoundly changed the way libraries view suppliers. Libraries depend on vendors for a much broader range of services than ever and have a high stake in what happens in the industry. Mergers proliferate, reduce supplier choices and escalate librarians' concerns with regard to the industry. Contrary to popular belief, the library community is well aware of many challenges of being in business, because librarians face similar challenges in their libraries. This discussion is one librarian's view, in consultation with others, of the book and serials industry changes and their effects on libraries.

Like all other businesses, the library book and serial industry has stages patterned similar to the life stages of a person or even some of the products they produce (e.g. serials).

They are born and they die. In between they develop relationships with libraries and other relevant businesses through formal contracts and informal verbal agreements. They often marry by developing partnerships or mergers with other companies. They have out-of-the-nest experiences by downsizing and selling off parts. They divorce by splitting or splintering from each other. Business resurrections are rare if they exist at all. Companies in this industry almost never return their original structures or products. The strategy is to move forward with the intent to change in response to the marketplace and even to drive that change by anticipating market needs. All of these instances affect the suppliers' library customers.

One must be very careful, however, in drawing a too close analogy to the type of interpersonal relationships experienced among friends and family. After all, business is business and companies deal with the bottom line. Customers really should not expect to have the same permanence with suppliers that we have in their personal lives. Libraries, however, should expect some level of stability and dedication to customer needs. There are realities to running a business that all customers need to understand. Business thrives by assuring profits and showing growth, creating and preserving a niche or market share, and continually responding to changing markets.

Any business, like all organizations, is subject to changes in personnel and administrators, the whims of management, market needs or opportunities, and technological developments. To thrive most businesses need to reinvent themselves every five to seven years, if not more frequently, to maintain the attention of its customers. Considering the plethora of industry changes and particularly mergers in the past five years, publishing and distribution companies certainly have captured the attention of libraries.

Everyone in this business, including librarians, recognize that we live in a capitalistic society. Rumor has been for some time that the capitalistic model is breaking down. As we meld social and business needs together there is evidence that, to some extent, this is true. Societal pressures certainly affect business profits. However, if there were not sufficient profit in this industry, suppliers would not be vying so avidly for the library market. Some suppliers talked about forming partner-

ships with their customers; however, the nature of such partnerships is ill defined and, obviously, cannot be binding. Long-term binding partnerships represent a conflict of interest for non-profit institutions that rely primarily on public moneys.

To place this in perspective, we must remind ourselves that we live in a culture of "never-enough." To wit, companies talk about low profit margins. Nearly everyone in the work world feels that incomes fall short of expectations and increasing living standards are continually raising those expectations. Public institutions, including libraries, complain of low budgets. Library user expectations are increasing at phenomenal rates. Statistically, it is a fact that most library collection budgets are not meeting inflationary costs of materials. Obviously competition in the market place affects everyone.

Competition affects not only business but non-profit organizations too in both good and challenging ways. During a ground breaking ceremony for the new wing of our main library building in 1997, Penn State's football coach, Joe Paterno, charged University Libraries to strive to become number one, forging the same competitive challenge that drives his football teams. Make no mistake about it, public institutions of all kinds battle continually not only for survival and their fair share, but to play a dominant role among their peers. Good libraries help colleges and universities to attract more good students. This is not unlike companies who strive for dominant market shares. In response to the coach's challenge, the University Libraries have improved their standing. Of course, improved ratings can result from simply becoming better at responding to surveys. The fact is, like businesses, many libraries have developed a more strategic focus in moving forward. In the past decade, universities and libraries have adopted quality techniques, improved their planning skills, and benchmarked with each other to determine and engage in best practices. All of this is done to improve an organization's strategic position.

Libraries are not just competing with each other, but with the very same corporate entities (e.g. AT&T, Microsoft, Amazon, etc.) that confront our traditional suppliers. Libraries seek to maintain a niche in the world of information dissemination. Staying ahead of the customers' needs presents considerable

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size and thereby cutting down the time that users have to wait for the animation to load.

If you have numerous documents or handouts to publish on the Web in a short time, Adobe Acrobat is a good choice for their management. It transforms different types of documents into PDF format to be viewed by the Acrobat Reader, compliments of its manufacturer. With Acrobat one can also turn PhotoShop images into thumbnail pictures on the fly, and create interactive Web forms with ease. There are numerous tracking and counter services you can use to monitor visitors to your site. If you want to do a proactive online survey, Message

Parse, a small program that works on your local computer, will help extract data from e-mail inboxes that receive survey form responses. Then Microsoft Excel can be used to open the tabulated ASCII data and turn it into a spreadsheet. Excel as well as more sophisticated data analyzing software like SPSS can handle the data analysis.

Undoubtedly, none of the software and services examined by this article are totally free. Yet, their application eventually proves to be cost effective and less prone to human error. Of course, software itself will not work without a well-trained Web developer who can use it effectively, and training itself incurs costs. Analysis of those factors, however, can be discussed in a future paper. 🌱