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From the Other Side of the Street-What is Local? The Library of the Future?

Thomas Bacher

Purdue University Press, bacher@uakron.edu

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From the Other Side of the Street — What is Local? The Library of the Future?

by **Thomas Bacher** (Director, Purdue University Press; phone: 1-800-933-9637; fax: 1-765-496-2442)
<bacher@purdue.edu> <http://www.thepress.purdue.edu>

The great debate rages these days like a bad Lincoln-Douglas rerun. Is there a place out there for a Coffmanesque all-encompassing digital library built on the Amazon.com scheme (see SEARCHER. Vol. 7, No. 3, March 1999)? Or is more room needed for the Crawfordesque local structures known as the local public library to house independent and cheaper collections, provide better customer service, and put real books in real peoples' hands ("Gutting America's Local Libraries," www.incolsa.net/HTML/teleconf/coff.htm)? At the point of sounding genuinely nonplused, does anyone really care about a discussion that Crawford describes rather tongue and cheek as a conflict between crusaders and the logic and math crowd. Please! I'm sure that even Richard the Lionhearted could work his way around some strategy and numbers. True, Coffman does dabble in hyperbole and conclusions drawn from, at best, nouveau data. Nonetheless, it seems that any rebuttal of the earth's largest digital library

should not become a rehash of the status quo.

Recently, I had the pleasure of traveling to the **Frankfurt Book Fair**. The Fair itself brings together publishers from all over the world to spend several days in one place discussing opportunities, rights availability, and distribution realities. Frankfurt is only a short train ride away from Mainz, the hometown of the person whose creative genius led to the widespread dissemination of information—**Johannes Gutenberg**. Although, the printing industry has gone through several technological revolutions, it still follows the age-old tradition of pressing ink onto paper to create books, newspapers, journals, and other important product derivations.

However, things are changing. Publishers have recognized that the ownership of information, information that a vast number of folks will want or need, is the key to future

success. Books are only one package that may contain the information and provide revenue to the publisher. A database available online, a file that fits on your PDA, a cut of the information included in some software product, a recombination of the original information with pictures and sound can also extend the publisher's revenue stream.

***"Today, not
everyone can own
a computer. Once
again the library
must be the societal
equalizer."***

So perhaps out of the insomnia that comes from strident stances on a particular issue like library digitization, some clues, thoughts and outright dreams can give us a better idea of what the future might be.

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Digital Library Take One or Any One Heard of NetLibrary.com?

All this talk about digital libraries leads me to **NetLibrary.com**. **NetLibrary** is in the process of trying to create the world's largest digital library of books (sound familiar). Over the last year, the agents of the company have been spreading the word among publishers and offer two protocols that have opened publishers' ears—initiative and protection.

On the initiative side, **NetLibrary** is willing to take a publisher's book in digital format or as a printed entity and convert it to a format that is useable on **NetLibrary's** proprietary software. The publisher does not have to invest anything up front and receives a royalty for every book sold. (Under the **NetLibrary** model, libraries must actually purchase individual copies of electronic titles at a price that the publisher sets. If a library wants five copies of the latest Clancy novel, the library must purchase five electronic copies rather than securing multiple accesses to a single copy.) Many publishers view this as a wonderful marketing opportunity to drive customers to the real book—a unique package that, as time goes on, is becoming an inexpensive, convenient and portable alternative to the \$100-\$500 electronic book readers.

Secondly, the **NetLibrary** model makes sense to publishers because it is built on a secure premise, at least in the eyes of the publisher. That is, a library, as I've mentioned, buys an individual copy of an electronic title for their collection, and this electronic title is checked out like a real book. So if Student Smith has already checked out *Hoosier Home Remedies*, Professor Charles would not have access to the title. This model does prove problematic to many librarians because they would rather have the book accessible to Professor Charles, if Student Smith is not currently using the book. (By and large, this is a software problem. Library management systems software may need to be updated to allow for different varieties of checkout—daily, hourly, etc. Also, the software might be designed to see if Student Smith is currently using the title. If not, the software may be able to provide Professor Charles access for a limited time.) Under this controlled circulation model, publishers feel that they have great assurance that their titles will not be bandied about the Internet in pirated versions, are comfortable in the fact that they will generate revenues, and will be able to ensure permission holders that such a system is very similar to current book publishing. Therefore, pricing for obtaining copyrighted materials should remain pretty stable.

Even though there are some concerns—(some publishers are only providing backlist materials to **NetLibrary** and thus are forc-

ing libraries to buy bound copies of new books. Publishers could back out of their deals with **NetLibrary** and change the collection significantly. Also, publishers are now trying to decide how territorial rights and royalties are to be allocated and divided under a system where there are no real country borders.) regarding the future viability of **NetLibrary.com**, the sheer existence of such an organization has moved the monograph digitization dilemma to the front burner. The question is not how can a digital global library be created, but can a digital global library succeed.

Location, Location, Location.

I have had a yearning to get out from under the past. In order to do so, as someone once said, you have to face up to it. Now, my past would encompass Nagoya, Japan, Chamonix, France, Kelsterbach, Germany, Duluth, Minnesota, Cleveland, Ohio, New York City, Norwalk, Connecticut and now even West Lafayette, Indiana. At the going rate, my expenses would far exceed my salary not to mention the strain on the family, so I may not find what I'm looking for in the near or distant future.

If I had access to several digital libraries, I could cruise a lot of sources from my desktop, both free and fee-based. I could scan the newspapers in Kelsterbach looking for the *Mundorfs*. I could search Duluth records for local Air Force base stories. I could check out the scores of the football team at Valley Forge High or see if someone wrote a book about the team.

In essence, what we consider local isn't really restricted by place. We have seen the rise of this type of phenomena in the appeal of satellite packages like the NFL Sunday ticket that allows viewers to watch any football game, by the appeal of Internet radio that gives me German radio stations live, and by the convenience of reading the *New York Times* online.

The virtual nomadic capacity of this generation and those to come, those already imbued with the sense of digital place and those for whom there will be no question of it, will greatly impact the role of the local public library. Attempts at creating a superstructure that provides access to vast quantities of accurate and reliable information regardless of location are already underway.

* In late 1998, the California Legislature allocated \$ 5 million to begin linking all 8,000 public and private California libraries into a single, interactive resource. That would mean the electronic databases of every library would be instantly available to any library patron anywhere in the state, so that someone who couldn't find a particular book in the Mission Viejo Library could find a copy in Eureka or at Stanford University within seconds and request its delivery.

* At the Fairfax County Public Library in Virginia and the Mid-Century Public Library in Missouri, patrons can use a library Web site to search the system's catalog for books, place the books on reserve, order, and have them delivered to the nearest local branch within a day or two.

* The infrastructure to access a global library catalog is also growing. The San Francisco main library has 220 computer workstations offering public access to library databases and the Internet. In fact, according to recent **American Library Association** statistics, 73% of the nation's 16,000 branch libraries offer Internet access to the public.

As circulation continues to decline at libraries around the country, visitors will continue to rise as long as libraries keep becoming the public access portals to the Internet, a societal leveling aspect that libraries always have had. That is, previously, not everyone could purchase books so the library provided free public access to them. Today, not everyone can own a computer. Once again the library must be the societal equalizer.

Book It, Dan-O

A recent (9/99) **Gallup Poll** asked respondents how they generally selected books they

read. Almost one third of the respondents said that they selected their books by browsing through the aisles of a bookstore or library. Another 55% said that they selected their books by either acting on a recommendation from someone they knew or because the author was familiar to them.

Publishers have realized this for quite a while and have told their authors advertising is remarkably ineffective, but word of mouth is the key to getting books sold.

What do these numbers have to do with the earth's largest library idea? Let's say I have a friend who has told me that *Women in the Sciences* is a must read, and I should go out and get a copy post haste. Off I trek

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39 Joanna Drive

Foxboro, MA 02035

Phone: 800 346-3662

Fax: 508 698-0148

E-mail: middeldorp@nijhoff.nl

LIAISON OFFICE

New York

Phone: 800 664-1853

Fax: 518 226-0286

E-mail: endres@nijhoff.nl

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to my nearest public library only to find that the copy of the book is checked out for the next two weeks. Despondent, I ask the service folks to put the book on reserve so that I can come pick it up when the book is returned. They inform me that they can search to see if another library in the system has the title. I am overjoyed. The good folks search the entire county system and find that four libraries have the book in their collections, but unfortunately not one of those copies is on the shelf. I leave unsatisfied.

Move ahead five years. I am interested in getting a copy of a new book by **Chelsea Clinton**, *My Story: The Presidential Years and Tears*, because my best friend has just finished reading it online, and she can't stop talking about it. I pop up my Web connection and search the entire state online catalog. Every copy of the book has been checked out. I decide not to browse the library catalogs of neighboring states because I'd have to wait two days to get the book if it were available. Instead, I request that a copy of the book be printed and bound at the storefront library that happens to be

next to my regular grocery store. (I have to get some things for dinner anyway.)

Unlike my friend, I actually like the look and feel of a real book. Besides, I'll be going to Mexico, and I hate taking along too many electronic devices. After getting my groceries, I stop by the ten-by-ten library space which is staffed by one librarian who has access to a new high volume book-omagic machine that is linked to hundreds of publishers' catalogs and book data files, a digital replicator for music, software, movies and other multi-media productions, and a scanner for my library card. The librarian swipes my card through her reader, checks my request, reaches under the counter and hands me my freshly produced book. One of the many reasons that I moved to West Lafayette was because they have one of the better library systems in the country. As a regular citizen, I can have limitless copies of books as long as I return them to be recycled into new books. If I want to actually

own the book I could pay an additional fee.

As we continue to travel along the digital highway, the boundaries between bookstores, libraries, and publishers will become unclear. The distance between information user and information owner will lessen and access to information will increase. Soon more and more of us will be capable of being a data miner or data detective, a datachologist or datanician, or a cyberian or cybervater.

The Hyperlinked Catalog Entry

One of the more potent of Coffman's ideas is the idea of a FAT catalog record as opposed to the skinny catalog record that currently exists. Issues about creation of this record cause a stir among librarians. How can we verify record contents? Won't publishers say all the wrong things? What about all the misinformation? Although I understand librarians concerns regarding these issues, the future digitization of books will create a democratization of catalog records. One of the

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"Instead, I request that a copy of the book be printed and bound at the storefront library that happens to be next to my regular grocery store."

Academic Book Trends — Late Expectations - (Un)Expected Publication Dates

by **Celia Scher Wagner** (Manager, New Titles, Blackwell's)
<Celia.Wagner@Blackwell.com>, <celiaw@acbc.com>

As most members of the book world know, publishers generally announce titles prior to publication, citing Expected Publication (EP) dates for those titles both in their catalogs and in the information they provide to the Library of Congress for c.i.p. (Cataloging in Publication) records. Vendors and reference providers usually display these dates in their online databases, allowing libraries to predict with some accuracy when forthcoming books will appear.

The question is: with how much accuracy? How often are books actually published when the publishers predict they will be?

We surveyed our database of all titles covered for the academic library market, looking for those that met these two criteria:

- We ordered well in advance of the originally-announced (publisher-supplied) Expected Publication date as shown in c.i.p.

- We received a copy of the book

In other words, we eliminated books which never arrived, and which, conceivably, never were published.

The results are shown below. Forty per-

cent of titles arrived either the month before they were expected, or in the expected month. The other sixty percent arrived at least one month late. Six percent arrived more than six months late, despite repeated claiming once the original EP date had passed. Although the chart does not show it, the curve falls off very slowly after six months. If a book missed its EP date by six months or more, it probably missed by more.

(A colleague of mine remarked that, to him, this distribution has that real-life ring of truth. When he misses a deadline, he is either a little bit late, or totally out of the ballpark.)

What are the implications of this graph for vendors, and for libraries? First, EP dates need to be seen as suggestions only—more than half of the time, they are too optimistic. Second, vendors (and publishers) need to be vigilant about updating EP dates, and replacing slipped dates with the next best guess, so that libraries can feel confident the dates they see are only reasonably optimistic, not wildly so. 🐼

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problems that information providers have faced in their quest for digitization was a lack of standards. Several prominent organizations (see <http://openebook.org/who.htm>) have worked closely to create an open eBook standard—a specification for eBook file and format structure based on HTML and XML, the languages used to format information for Web sites. The goal of the specification is “to quickly create a critical mass of compelling content...and the content will be compatible with a wide variety of reading devices.” (See <http://openebook.org/>). These new standards will also enable better searching of individual titles. Customer demand may also force publishers to put up sample chapters, entire titles and other qualitative material to entice readers to check out or purchase information. The Amazon.com model with comments from the publisher, author, and reader will become commonplace. The FAT bibliographic record will eventually include audio, video, and chats with the author. All of these enhancements will be of benefit to the user and provide the user the means to make personal judgments regarding a title's applicability to their own

situation. Beauty will definitely be in the eye of the beholder.

The Governance Issue

A serious question about the earth's largest digital library is how will it all be governed. The growth of the Internet seems to be a perfect example of what could happen. The Internet's growth, as it appears today, seems revolutionary. However, the day-to-day, year-to-year reality really portrays an evolutionary path. As needs arose, people and organizations stepped in to address those needs. Systems, relationships, and products came about, in many instances, because the compelling need to collaborate far outstripped merely parochial interests.

Likewise, if information providers embrace the earth's largest digital library concept, systems will be built, procedures will be implemented and cooperation will come about. The cooperation should, however, be inclusive. Librarians alone cannot build this enormous system. Publishers, wholesalers, online and traditional bookstores, and other information enablers must have a say in the process. Perhaps, the system might become much like the zip code system for shipping management software. The earth's largest

digital library information will come as part of any good information management software and will be updated regularly as part of the software maintenance fee.

Concluding Remarks

Ideas are the seeds for future developments. The earth's largest digital library is an idea that must be examined closely. One of the more problematic aspects of arguing against an idea use present day models to caution against implementation. Using the old “It'll never work” paradigm makes complete sense because under current circumstances it couldn't work, or it would already be in place.

The real question is: “What are current trends telling us about the future?” Several current trends indicate that computer use is on the rise, Internet use is on the rise, more digitization of materials is taking place, the current generation of youngsters consider a computer to be like a toaster (just another appliance), and the quantity and variety of information is on the rise. The mix of what is needed seems to be in place.

Let's bake the access methods to the earth's largest digital library, and let our users eat their information cake. 🐼