December 2002

Between the Stacks: The Emergence of a New Library Community

Allen Williams MLIS

Between the Stacks

Joanne Eustis

Director University Library

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>

Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Williams, Allen MLIS and Eustis, Joanne (2002) "Between the Stacks: The Emergence of a New Library Community," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 14: Iss. 6, Article 13.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3945>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Between the Stacks: The Emergence of a New Library Community

by Allen Williams, MLIS (Founder, Between the Stacks, Sunnyvale, CA)

Library science professionals all know that the Internet is a powerful and easy way to aggregate and disseminate information. Oddly enough, I have tried for years to locate a place on the Internet where members of our field could congregate. I envisioned a Website where all sorts of individuals could freely come and go, ask questions and share their work experiences. The site would be a casual yet informative oasis where we could find support from other library science professionals around the world. Late one night in November 2002, unemployed and needing a creative outlet, I decided to take action and create what I could not find.

To my knowledge, **Between the Stacks** (www.betweenthestacks.com) is the first online discussion site created exclusively for library and information science (LIS) professionals. Containing a series of online forums where everyone from library students to library directors may gather, the site creates a common ground for discussing issues, sharing ideas or chatting with a fellow colleague. Still in its infancy, the site is growing steadily with an international membership of nearly 200 registered users to date.

In an attempt to be all-inclusive, forum topics run the gamut and include specific areas for academic libraries, public libraries, special libraries, government libraries, school libraries, archives, medical libraries, competitive intelligence, LIS students, LIS instructors and even a place to post your job announcements. Discussion areas also include off-topic sections such as "Rant & Relax" where you can talk (i.e. vent) about your workday or "The Book Nook" to discuss a book you recently read.

You might be wondering, but what is a "forum?" Although a common form of online discussion, it seems to be a newer concept for members of our profession. We are familiar with listservs and how they function, but the discussion forum differs in some respects and provides a broader discussion platform. You simply visit the Website and review the threads of discussion. Once you have registered, you may post questions or join a thread of discussion. New discussions occur everyday and site users are finding that they check the forums each day to participate in the latest discussions.

The discussion forum format allows you to be selective in what you read. You go to it when you have time, instead of having its contents forced into your ever-growing inbox. Everything is nicely categorized and you can quickly view new posts since your last visit. My favorite feature though is that forums allow for a greater range of personal expression and anonymously if you so chose. You can express your opinions freely without the fear that your colleagues will stone you during your lunch break.

Throughout college I utilized discussion forums for a variety of uses — for hobbies and personal interests. The site utilizes open source software that is both powerful and easy to use. Site functionality allows for seeing who is online at any given time and the ability to send personal messages between site members. All content within forums is searchable and members may create profiles

about themselves, post pictures or even create online polls.

From its initial conception, **Between the Stacks** was up and running within only a few days. For the past three years, I used my library science skills in an information architecture role to create a Web-based content management application. Although I have worked in both academic and special libraries over the years, I drew upon my non-traditional library science experience to technically build the site. In some ways I have the dot-com bust to thank for **Between the Stacks** finding life. My unemployment status gave me the time and energy to create this service.

My initial goal of creating an online community for our profession has been met, but I plan on continuing to foster the growth of **Between the Stacks**. In only a few short weeks, I have received numerous emails from library professionals across the states commenting on the forums. Everyone loves the idea of bringing students, instructors, and LIS professionals together in one setting.

The only obstacle for **Between the Stacks** is the slight apprehension from library professionals in using the discussion forum medium. I am not sure where the fear comes from, but I would encourage site visitors to post on the forums and realize that it is a friendly and welcoming environment. There is nothing to fear

here. The forums are only what we are willing to make of them — the more that they are used, the more robust and useful they will become.

Collection Assessment ... from page 56

findings showing the comparative strength or weakness of an individual collection are not a report card or value judgment, nor are low or high circulation rates bad or good. The results are only to help us identify areas of the collection that might go to our storage facility, or areas in which some cooperative purchasing might be appropriate. If age of collection seems inappropriate in particular subject areas or if low circulation rates are seen as problematic, then let this cooperative project try to address those issues.

So far the assessments done and the data gathered are beginning to tell us some things about the individual and consortial collections. I hope that over the next year the librarians at our four institutions will be able to continue to examine the data to learn even more to help us make decisions for cooperative collection building and management.

On the Road from page 73

has been designated "Library Way," and it is being decorated with bronze plaques in the sidewalk honoring great authors. The **Algonquin Hotel** is only a few blocks away, making this a real literary Mecca.

Some of the other "library" amenities include a selection of international newspapers, a video library of the **American Film Institute's** Top 100 films, and a complimentary breakfast in the Reading Room with real New York bagels. There is also a "Poetry Garden" with a terrace and a "Writer's Den" with a fireplace. They are both open 24 hours a day, just for when that bolt of inspiration hits you at 3 AM. The terrace is surrounded by vistas of the neighboring parapets and cornices of the early twentieth century skyscrapers that surround the neighborhood. Ziggurats and Greek temples and Moorish fantasies of the time tower all around. These are the architectural fantasies that are in-

visible from the street, but which create a floating world of their own. It's easy to get carried away in the Poetry Garden.

The Hotel was built as an office building in 1912. It is where **Teddy Roosevelt** worked on *Outlook Magazine*. It was completely redesigned by **Stephen B. Jacobs** and decorated by his wife **Andi Pepper**. The over 6,000 books in the Hotel were all selected by the **Strand Bookstore**. **Adele Gutman**, Director of Sales and marketing and "Honorary Librarian" tells me that the books can be purchased at check out.

The atmosphere of the **Library Hotel** is an island of tranquillity in New York City. I would highly recommend it for a thoughtful weekend or as a quiet retreat during a business trip. It is a great place to explore the joy of reading in the heart of indomitable New York City.

The Library Hotel is at
299 Madison Avenue at 41st Street.
www.libraryhotel.com • 877-793-7323