Leaving the Books Behind

Mary E. (Tinker) Massey
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stated that usage determines value. Usage of Science Direct has doubled each year and currently is at 400,000 downloads/year which averages 67 uses/article and 44% from current year titles. However, Karen noted that libraries don't want use based pricing that doesn't have a cap and Tom Sanville added that publishers also need a firm revenue base.

Howard Ratner, CTO of Nature, looked at different ways to increase usage including indexing by Google, TOC alerts and reference linking, in addition to the more traditional abstracting and indexing services. Looking forward, Howard believes the future lies in RSS (really simple syndication) which is currently being used by news aggregators to keep readers up-to-date on the latest Weblogs. Potential applications of RSS are numerous and exciting but it's not yet widely adopted.

Publisher Concerns

While discussing different approaches to Open Access, some publishers voiced their concerns that new models could work well. John Ewing, Executive Director of the American Mathematical Society, pointed out his reservations.

- Relying on grants to underwrite the cost of publishing could give the sciences an edge since social science and humanities typically lack the strong grant funding.
- Scholars in developing nations can't afford the equivalent of page charges and will be at a disadvantage.
- It is likely that more papers will be published if driven by author charges.

Michael Jensen, Director of Publishing Technologies at the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), stated their goal to recover their costs while achieving the widest possible dissemination. NAS achieved early success years ago by putting a less than optimal version of the full text of their books on the Web in HTML which effectively increased their book sales. However, an experiment they conducted recently indicated that if potential buyers had access to a downloadable pdf version, book sales would fall by 44%.

Conclusion

The sole academic librarian attending this meeting, Doug Jones, is from the science and engineering team at the University of Arizona. He found the program dealt with congruent issues similar to those facing librarians. The leading question is how can we leverage access to the scholarly record in ways that serve the end user with constrained resources?

Publishers are experiencing many of the same stresses that affect librarians as their users expect (and are receiving) easy access to more content. More than a tool, technology becomes a driver, enabling new levels of service and requiring new business models. We must all adapt.

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Leaving the Books Behind

by Mary E. (Tinker) Massey (MLS Student, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC) <MMassey@gwm.sc.edu>

From the late 70's to mid 90's, I was wedded to serials in a number of unusual ways. I began as a copy cataloger in a new serials unit where we were responsible for cataloging in all languages and for all subject areas. It was a challenge and a great excitement in my life. Our unit head erad many of the lines that divided librarians from copy catalogers in those days. She taught us well, then had us CONSER trained, authority trained, and exposed to any and all of the OCLC and SOLINET serials courses possible. I found myself helping to set up the subject formats for the Florida Newspaper Project and handling all of the microform cataloging for serials. Each day I had a passion to learn more about serials and do better cataloging. Suddenly, I was asked to handle all of the serials problems in a new maintenance unit, where I did serial reclassification, withdrawals for all system cohorts, and coordinated solutions for many of the online problems that involved faculty complaints of poor access. Those days were so busy, that I never dreamed of being able to go back to school. Now, after the loss of two husbands, retirement, and a small stroke, I am working in two different libraries and in school working on that elusive MLS. The new opportunity to discuss library trends and problems and explore new solutions has given impetus to my life.

...
Some years ago while among the crowd flowing out of an auditorium after a conference presentation, I overheard someone say, “You know, if you bullet nonsense, it’s still nonsense.” This off-the-cuff clarification struck me as insightful and funny. I’ve always remembered it.

Today the remark would be a near-commonplace, but this was early in the PowerPoint era. Most of us in that room probably hadn’t as yet given a PowerPoint presentation and maybe hadn’t witnessed more than five or six of them. We were still getting used to these presentations that were slicker than what we’d seen before. In those days it was possible to be dazzled by PowerPoint, even a little intimidated by people who used it. Who could have known what an instrument of mass tedium had been set loose?

We know now. In all storms of animosity against Microsoft, no lightning rod is higher in the sky than PowerPoint. If you doubt that, just call up Google and key in “hate powerpoint.” In “Results 1-10 of about 61,600,” you’ll see her headers and links:

I hate PowerPoint
I hate PowerPoint. Category: Stupid Stuff I found this great parody …
Why I Hate PowerPoint
Why I hate PowerPoint. It’s blah and unimaginative.
Why I Hate PowerPoint
Why I Hate PowerPoint 2. You don’t have to be a Picasso to use it.

Tufte is a Yale emeritus professor who in retirement has become something of a cult figure through several books about analytical design published by his own Graphics Press. The Visual Display of Quantitative Information, the first of these, gave Tufte a platform which he uses to demonstrate how complicated phenomena can be beautiful and clearly presented. While at it, he has also become an at-large cultural critic, at least within the domain of graphic display. And he has left no room for doubt on this: Tufte hates PowerPoint.

On his Website Tufte offers for sale a 27-page booklet entitled The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint. In this essay, parts of which were published in Wired magazine, Tufte elaborates on what he considers the program’s defects: “…foreshortening of evidence and thought, low spatial resolution, a deeply hierarchical single-path structure as the model for organizing every type of content, breaking up narrative and data into slides and minimal fragments, rapid temporal sequencing of thin information rather than focused spatial analysis, conspicuous decoration and Puff, a preoccupation with format not content, an attitude of commercialism that turns everything into a sales pitch.”

Along the way Tufte shows how decisions informed by PowerPoint presentations contributed to the 2003 space shuttle Columbia disaster, skewed a “witness” series of Harvard School of Public Health PowerPoint slide templates, compares PowerPoint to a drug meriton worldwide product recall, lavishes attention on a PowerPoint parody based on the “Gettysburg Address” (w), displays an hilarious parody poster of his own (for sale on Tufte’s Website), and in a brilliant mini-critique within his larger critique, refers to PowerPoint much of the time as “PP”.

Search your serials database and you will find Tufte and other critics; but you will also find that PowerPoint’s published friends far outnumber foes. After all, where do you turn when you have a presentation to give? “Conference for Big Business” is a representative magazine article; “Learning to Love PowerPoint” coaxes novices along: “Try Lightening the Mood with a Bright and Entertaining Template” is a set of intermediate pointers; and “A PowerPoint without Bullets is Possible, and Beautiful as Well” is, of course, for the advanced presenter. What the next two articles say about the state of the skin trade I am not sure, but dutiful database searchers will find that “Posters a la PowerPoint” was a feature in Dermatology Times, and that “The Savvy Physician’s Motto: PowerPoint or Perish” ran not long ago in Cosmetic Surgery Times.

Cosmetic surgeons are not the only savvy ones, of course: Everyone uses PowerPoint. A 2001 “Annals of Business” feature in The New Yorker reported that the software resides on two hundred and fifty million computers; that the co-inventor of PowerPoint retired a wealthy man and today spends time collecting antique concertinas; that Microsoft estimates thirty million or more PowerPoint presentations are delivered daily; and that the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered US bases around the world to simplify their presentations because...continued on page 73