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eBooks and E-content: A Panel Discussion at Charleston

by **Ellen McCullough** (Marketing Director, xrefer, 31 St. James Ave., Suite 370, Boston, MA 02116; Phone: 617-426-5710; Fax: 617-426-3103) <ellen.mccullough@xrefer.com>

On November 5th, 2004, I had the pleasure of moderating a panel discussion at the **Charleston Conference** entitled, "eBooks and E-content: Evolving Perspectives on Users' Needs." Participating in the panel was **Cynthia L. Gregory**, head of electronic resources at the Archbishop Alter Library, **College of Mount St. Joseph**; **Rick Lugg**, partner at **R2 Consulting**; **Karen Christensen**, CEO of **Berkshire Publishing Group**; and **J.L. Needham**, strategic partner development manager at **Google, Inc.** The presenters offered dynamic and thought-provoking views on eBooks and e-content, usability, search engines, and how print publishers are transitioning from print to online.

Rick Lugg got us all up to speed with a comprehensive overview of the eBook industry, and **Karen Christensen** provided a valuable publisher's perspective on the challenges of producing print and electronic versions of the same reference content at the same time. The focus of this article, though, is on **Cynthia Gregory's** research, which is outlined in greater detail below and the comments by **J.L. Needham** of **Google**. **Gregory's** research provided valuable insight into problems and existing attitudes towards eBooks, while **Needham** presented a compelling view of one likely solution to those problems.

This panel grew out of an online reference research award that **xrefer** offered in March 2004. The grant was awarded to **Gregory**, whose study was entitled "'But I Want a Real Book'—an Investigation of Undergraduate Students' Usage and Attitudes toward eBooks." We at **xrefer** were intrigued by **Cynthia's** proposal, because, while we don't consider ourselves a producer or provider of eBooks, as an aggregator of full text content from print reference books, we are often mistaken for one and we face similar challenges to eBook providers. We are convinced that electronic content can offer much more than current eBook models. **Gregory's** research promised to uncover some of the impediments to usage that both eBook and e-content providers may be encountering.

The study revealed surprising student perceptions about eBooks that run counter to widespread assumptions about the reception of eBooks at universities. The results of **Cynthia's** study were quite compelling and are food for thought for those of us who are in the business of providing electronic content, whether in eBook or aggregated database form.

At the **College of Mount St. Joseph**, **Gregory** and other librarians had been observing students' reactions to eBooks for some time. The library started offering eBooks via **netLibrary** in 2000, and has since added offerings from other vendors to their catalog. Librarians promoted these resources to students, faculty and staff with brochures, bookmarks, training sessions, and e-mail announcements. In addition, they loaded MARC records into their online

catalog. Accesses to **netLibrary** titles spiked from 31 to 714 in the first year, and usage of eBooks has steadily increased in subsequent years.

At the same time that usage was increasing, however, so were negative comments. According to **Gregory's** proposal, "librarians began to notice that students who encountered **netLibrary** records while searching the library's online catalog were reluctant to pursue them. For example, when a librarian explained to a patron that a particular book that interested her was an eBook, the patron shook her head and said, 'But I want a real book.'"

The formal study was conducted in early Fall 2004, as a paper-based questionnaire that the library administered to four randomly chosen undergraduate classes; the library received 105 responses. The survey questions covered comfort with technology, whether or not the students had heard of or used eBooks, why they had or had not used them, what they liked and disliked about eBooks, as well as their thoughts about whether they would use eBooks in the future.

Sixty-six percent of the respondents indicated a preference for print books, while 34 percent preferred eBooks. When asked why they liked or disliked eBooks, their reasons were remarkably similar in several areas:

1. **Convenience/Access:** eBook fans noted that they can access the book anywhere, anytime, while print book lovers noted that they can... access the book anywhere, anytime.
2. **Reading comprehension/concentration:** eBook fans said they "can focus on a computer screen better than trying to flip through a book," while print book fans commented that "seeing the pages and chapters is easier in my mind to follow sequential info" and "with a printed book I can highlight and take notes knowing that I am processing information."
3. **Portability:** eBook supporters said print books are heavy and that they prefer storing files on computer rather than carrying the book around, while print book fans said they prefer carrying a book around rather than a computer.

Other eBook "likes" included cost, with comments that eBooks save money and are not subject to late fees, as well as the ability to print only the pages needed and to take notes on them. Additional "dislikes" include searching and navigation, with comments that "sites and menus are confusing" and eBooks are "hard to scroll through."

Cynthia concluded her presentation by acknowledging that there is a need for more information and for continued marketing of eBooks and e-content. The majority of students prefer print books, but they use eBooks for specific reasons such as research, reference, and homework, and, while students recognize the usefulness of eBooks, they still have a desire for print books. **Gregory** noted that "eBooks and print books are contently coexisting."

To me, this reaffirms that there are audiences for both print and electronic content. The percentage of those who prefer eBooks might increase if eBooks were designed to be more than just e-versions of the same print content, with added features and functionality such as interactivity, customization, and linking to internal and external sources. In addition, eBooks should be less isolated and more integrated with the rest of the collection of which they are a part.

Content providers also need to understand and accept that there are particular kinds of content that are—and are not—suited to online delivery. In that regard, it is useful to consider **Mick O'Leary's** column from *Online* (Sept.-Oct. 2003), entitled "eBook Scenarios Updated," in which he recalls his predictions from three years earlier: that the "eBook killer apps would be in texts, manuals, reference books, and professional books." He goes on to identify four factors of successful eBooks: that they are meant to be used, not read; are more successful as aggregations vs. single works; are most suitable to institutional vs. individual subscribers; and are based on subscription, not transactional, pricing.

J.L. Needham's presentation was entitled "The Twin Problems with eBooks: Or, Why Can't I Google an eBook?" **Needham** spoke about the challenges of leading users to an eBooks platform and, once they arrive, providing a research experience that meets expectations conditioned by other full-text databases and general purpose search engines. (Note that this panel discussion occurred before **Google** announced some of its recent, buzzworthy news: they had just announced **Google Print**, but had yet to announce **Google Scholar** and the partnership with several major libraries to digitize their copyright-free holdings.)

Needham posited that search engines are "the de facto point of departure" for research by novice and professional researchers alike, and noted that search engines have "awakened new curiosities, made a hobby of information discovery [and] rendered many traditional reference tools idle or obsolete."

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Search engines are everywhere, and they are meeting expectations, according to **Needham**, who cited the *Pew Internet & American Life Project* and *ComScore Networks* August 2004 study, "The Popularity and Importance of Search Engines" (http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Data_Memo_Searchengines.pdf). According to the study, US Internet users turn to search engines for "convenience and effectiveness." Eighty-seven percent find what they're seeking most of the time, expressing "satisfaction, trust, self-confidence." Forty-four percent use search engines to discover "vital information that they absolutely need." In June 2004, there were 3.9 billion searches, an average of 33 searches per user, an average 4.4 searches per visit, and an average visit time of 41 minutes. Using search engines is second only to e-mail as the most popular online activity.

Search engines are so ubiquitous and pervasive, according to **Needham**, that they now condition users' expectations of information resources. Users have grown accustomed to an identifiable, easy to find and use search box; a default to all subjects; formats and full-text; formulaic relevancy ranking vs. mere raw keyword counting; and self-organizing results informed by custom taxonomies, with word proximity parameters.

Undergraduates are the most likely adopters of eBooks...but they don't find them.

For the most part, the eBooks that a search engine user can find are texts in the public domain, mostly pre-1923, from **Bartleby** and other advertising-sponsored reference resources, as well as such consumer purchase options as **Amazon**, **eBooks.com** and individual publishers. While search engine users can find these online, the riches available at their local libraries, subscription-based content, eBook platforms, databases or aggregated collections, are, for the most part, invisible to them.

How can we enable discovery of eBooks? One effort **Needham** cited is the **Open WorldCat** project. **OCLC** opened **WorldCat** records to search engine indexing, and started with a pilot that indexed 2 million abridged records for most-cataloged books. They had more than 3 million inbound links in September, and expanded to index all 57 million **WorldCat** records in early November.

Google Print may also enable discovery of eBooks. **Google** takes all types of print books (reference, scholarly, technical, trade) and makes them more discoverable by allowing end users to view brief slices of the full-text content. Hits on the content refer the end user to an appropriate sales channel as designated by the publisher of the work. Users have also requested that these results link to libraries.

Needham noted that it's up to the eBook and e-journal publishers and aggregators to make their content available for indexing (and hence, discovery and use) by search engine users. This would require replication of the e-journal's landing pages for abstracts (book description, sample chapter, perhaps controlled full-text browsing).

against the grain people profile

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BORN & LIVED: Born in Philadelphia, PA and spent my first 19 years there. I've lived in Massachusetts (both western and eastern) for the past 21 years

EARLY LIFE: Grew up in the wonderful city of Philadelphia and came from a family of artists. Decided to buck the trend and *not* go to art school, in spite of my interest in illustration and photography.

FAMILY: I live in Lexington, MA with my partner and two stepdaughters.

EDUCATION: BA, **University of Massachusetts**, Amherst, MA.

FIRST JOB: I wanted to get into book publishing, got my foot in the door as a customer service rep for **Little, Brown & Company**, and then became a sales rep.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: I spent 13 years in book publishing, first at **Little, Brown** then at **Harvard Business School Press**, in several sales and marketing positions. I fell in love with the Web and its potential to bring content to new audiences. I left book publishing for the dot-com world in 2000, right before the market crashed, to do online content and marketing communications. Now I'm marketing director at **xrefer**, which is at a perfect intersection of book publishing and the Web. I have always been interested in the role that technology plays in transforming information into knowledge and at **xrefer** I get to play with that notion a lot.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Write humor, perform stand-up comedy, draw, spend time with my family.

FAVORITE BOOKS: Too many to mention.

PHILOSOPHY: "Humor is emotional chaos remembered in tranquility." — **James Thurber**

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Anything where I've come up with a new idea that has reached others: coming up with new ways to present content, thinking up book titles, writing articles.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: I want librarians and library patrons to think of **xrefer** first when they think about where to go for answers to their reference questions.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: As more and more content becomes available online, there will be even more of a need for services like **xreferplus** that provide well-arranged collections of authoritative information. Also, context will be just as important as content, as the Semantic Web evolves. It will no longer be good enough to deliver 30,000 hits on search terms; search engines and content providers will have to understand more about what the user is looking for and deliver accordingly.

Libraries would benefit from a library locator to authentication solution, which **Needham** described as "**Open WorldCat** meets **ATHENS**." Furthermore, search engines should be welcomed into the library family, as library users are already using them as their launching pad for research. Search engines are like any database: as accurate and useful as their users—particularly gate-keeping users—make them.

Needham concluded by saying, "Publishers and librarians need to step forward to lead the next stage of the Internet's development, wherein the free Web and deep Web become intertwined, and search becomes the organizing principle of information resources and dominant mode of information discovery."

So where does this leave us? In my opinion, it could be that users want their eBooks and e-content to behave more like search engines, but search engines need to adopt the best features of online content in order to deliver the highest value in this regard. The most thoughtful providers of online content will focus on presenting a well-arranged collection of vetted resources that will integrate well with existing library resources and will ensure that the e-content becomes both more than the sum of its parts and more than just an online representation of the print version. If search engines want to be more like libraries, they need to deliver *meaning* and *context*, in addition to results.

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eBooks at Western Michigan University: A Case Study

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and **Bettina Meyer** (Assistant Dean for Resources, Western Michigan University, 1903 W. Michigan Avenue, Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5353; Phone: 269-387-5143) <bettina.meyer@wmich.edu>

Background

Western Michigan University (WMU) enrolls nearly 28,000 students and is ranked by the **Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching** in the category of Doctoral/Research Universities-Extensive. **Western** offers one hundred fifty-one undergraduate programs, seventy at the Master's level, two specialist programs, and thirty Doctoral degrees. In addition to the main campus, **Western** operates eight regional centers serving many remote users with no physical library for their immediate use; making the collection development of electronic resources critically important.

The University Libraries of **Western Michigan University** make available to students, faculty and staff over 150,000 electronic books, contained in a variety of eBook collections. Links to these collections are provided through the libraries' Website with the majority of titles being cataloged and available through the **OPAC**. Most of these titles were selected as part of entire collections or sub-collections with the remainder selected title by title.

Some of the eBook collections and services offered by University Libraries include:

- 1) The **American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) E-History Books Collection** containing significant and frequently cited history books published from the early 20th Century through the present day;
- 2) The **ebrary** "Academic Complete" collection offering access to over 19,000 eBooks from over 180 academic, trade and professional publishers;
- 3) **Early English Books Online (EEBO)** a growing database standing now at over 100,000 digitized facsimiles of books published in England between 1475 and 1661;

4) **gutenberg-e**, a small collection of digital monographs in the field of history;

5) **Project Gutenberg**, a collection of public domain e-texts;

6) **National Academies Press**, a collection offering over 3,000 freely available e-texts and a smaller sub-collection of titles available for purchase in PDF format; and

7) **netLibrary**, a collection of thousands of titles from multiple publishers, covering many disciplines.

These collections will be examined from several different angles:

- 1) Acquisition and access, 2) Cataloging, 3) eBook Applications, 4) Usage, 5) User Satisfaction, and 6) Disappointments and Successes.

Acquisition and Access

The **ACLS E-History Books Collection**¹ is a subscription database with a site license currently offering over 900 titles, which can be browsed or searched. **ebrary**² offers a subscription model with the subscribing institution leasing access to the collection for a period of time (in our case three years) providing a site license for unrestricted access. eBooks from **ebrary** require the patron to download their proprietary reader and also allow the patron to personalize a bookshelf featuring bookmarks, annotations and highlights. Additionally, **ebrary** makes available publisher branded databases from **Byron Hoyt**, **Datamonitor**, **Dun & Bradstreet**, **Harris Infosource**, and the **Society of Manufacturing Engineers**. **Early English Books**

Online³ is a purchased collection allowing unrestricted access for authorized users that can be searched or browsed. **gutenberg-e**⁴ is a subscription database with a site license. Titles available on **gutenberg-e** are linked from their home page. **Project Gutenberg**⁵ offers free access to almost 14,000 titles that may be searched

or browsed. What we make available to our patrons from **National Academies Press**⁶ are freely available titles (approximately 3,000), but about one-third of their portfolio (approximately 900) is available for a fee in PDF format. **netLibrary**⁷ sells individual eBooks and larger collections. University Li-

braries has acquired over 19,000 titles largely through the consortial purchase of mutually agreed upon collections of eBooks but also by individually selecting titles, primarily for electronic reserves. **netLibrary** allows patrons to search the collection and read online without a personalized account, but to "borrow" patrons must create that account. **netLibrary** restricts access to a single user for a given title, so when an item is "checked out" only that particular individual may view it. The purchase of multiple copies is needed to circumvent this restriction.

All of these publisher Websites are linked through the Libraries' home page. Most of the individual titles are cataloged with the 856 links passing through a proxy server.

Cataloging

Cataloging records have been provided for most major eBook collections adding value to the collections by providing an additional access point in the online catalog. Records for each eBook collection require unique loaders to be written for the Library's ILS. The involvement of a systems librarian, programmer, and cataloging librarian are necessary to prepare the records. ILS constraints on the number of records that could be loaded at one time imposed an additional delay in loading the records into the online catalog.

Perhaps the most difficult problem yet to be resolved is the quality of the cataloging records. This problem is not vendor specific. The quality of the records provided by all eBook vendors has been questioned by many cataloging librarians. The lack of quality and authority control creates a strong resistance to adding eBook records to the catalog. Though some collections such as **netLibrary** eBooks allow for adjustments prior to record production, most eBook collections do not provide this option and require more manipulation at the local level. Revision of cataloging records on a local ba-

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Google's efforts will definitely be a good thing for libraries and content providers alike, but both libraries and content providers would do well to continue to ensure that any user, whether they come from **Google**, the **OPAC** or anywhere else, will be able to find what they need. Your average Web user can search for "Aleutian Range" and come up with almost 4,500 results on **Google**, including a definition from *The American Heritage® Dictionary*. An **xreferplus** user will come up with the *American Heritage Dictionary®* definition, and can then easily link directly to entries from geography dictionaries, a browseable map from the

HarperCollins Atlas, images, encyclopedia entries, and more.

In delivering electronic content, eBooks have come a long way, but there's more work to be done. E-content users want an experience that is more than book-bound, database-bound or publisher-bound. There is a great need for comprehensive, well-organized online collections that deliver not just flat content or thousands of search results, but meaningful connections across resources that mirror the ways in which people discover and learn.

Ellen McCullough (ellen.mccullough@xrefer.com) is marketing director at xrefer, provider of online reference services to libraries worldwide.