Against the Grain

Volume 19 | Issue 2 Article 36

April 2007

As I See It! -- Where is the Web taking our Journals?

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Recommended Citation
Cox, John (2007) "As I See It! -- Where is the Web taking our Journals?," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 19: Iss. 2, Article 36.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.5076

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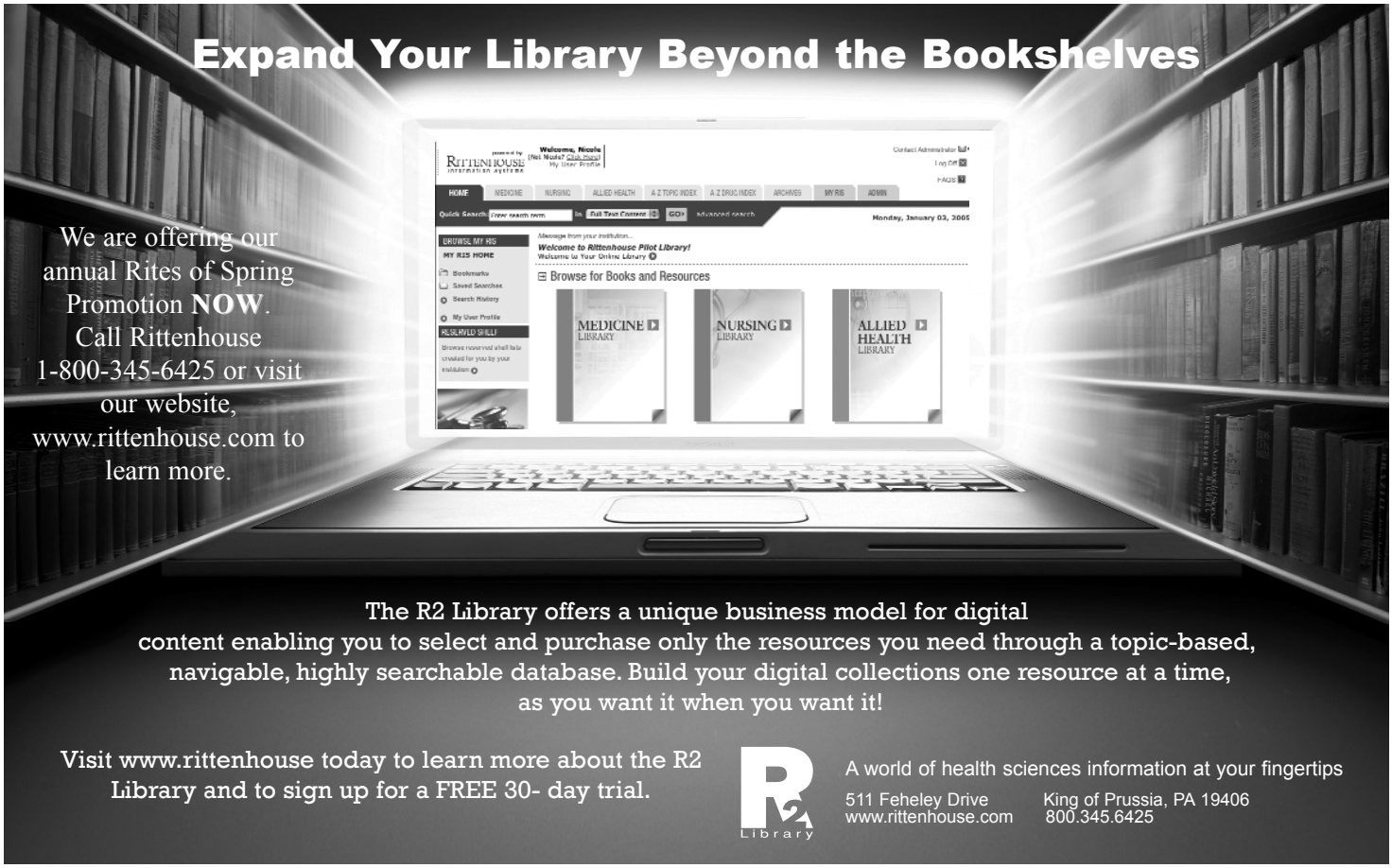

As I See It! — Where is the Web taking our Journals?

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The Upheaval Continues

The upheaval in the scholarly publishing system shows no signs of slowing down. What started in the seventeenth century as a stable, self-regulating, subscription-based printed journal system — the world in which I have spent my career — has been transformed into a much more complex publishing environment, in which online accessibility is now the principal means of dissemination and access. This process has not yet reached its end.

Today nearly 90% of journals are available online — nearly 93% of STM titles (**Cox J.** and **Cox L.**, *Scholarly Publishing Practice* (Second Survey), **ALPSP**, *Worthing*, 2006: see *http://www.alpsp.org/ngen_public/article.asp?id=200&did=47&aid=269&st=&oaid=-1*). A host of business models for access to this literature has emerged. It has made lives complicated for both publishers and librarians. And there is clearly no settled practice in pricing. Publishers cannot get together and talk about pricing. It is a breach of anti-trust law in the USA, and of competition law in Europe. Any substantive collusion between publishers, even to agree on pricing models, is unlawful. So cooperation between publishers on pricing is a no-no. The result is that generally accepted custom and practice will take a long time to emerge.

And the scholarly information community has now attracted the attention of the big players. **Google** and **Microsoft** are transforming search. Students and researchers are voting with their feet.

What Will Web 2.0 Bring to Scholarly Literature?

Web 2.0 is a challenge, and an opportunity, for both publishers and librarians. **Web 2.0** is a phrase coined by **Tim O'Reilly** of **O'Reilly Media** in 2004, describes a new generation of Web-based services that have at their core online collaboration and sharing among users: social networking sites, wikis, communication tools, and folksonomies. In reality, it is a clever sound bite that encompasses a range of disparate and unconnected concepts in the way information creation and use is developing. Nevertheless, it does describe a process in which, rather than publishing being a one-way process, it invites collaboration and harnesses the collective intelligence of users.

Two outstanding examples are

- **Wikipedia**, an online encyclopedia based on the unlikely notion that an entry can be added by any Web user, and edited by any other — contrast it with the expert review systems that lie behind the compilation of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. There has been a lot of debate on the listservs recently about whether academic libraries should recognize **Wikipedia** as a reliable source of academic information. It is open to manipulation. But the more users that participate, the better the information is likely to be. It represents a profound change in the dynamics of content creation!
- The concept of "folksonomies," a type of collaborative categorization of information or sites in which users choose their own keywords to describe the item. They are known as tags. **Google** bookmarks are a form of tagging. Two sites epitomize this phenomenon: **del.icio.us** and **Flickr**. The idea is that user

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collaboration permits multiple overlapping descriptions. The example always used is that of a photograph of a puppy, which could be described as "puppy" and "cute," and could be found along either axis.

What Has This to Do With Scholarship and Research?

I am profoundly skeptical of the idea that users will create a better index of scholarly information on the fly than a publishing system that works to a taxonomy honed over many years by scholars. However, the formal index is slow to change, and does not react to changes in disciplines very quickly, or to new areas of knowledge. Tagging is immediate. If tagging becomes second nature to researchers, the index can evolve in real time. Can publishers use folksonomies to complement conventional indexes? Yes, but only if tagging is widespread and intensive, so that new index terms become widely used and gather authority through use. Folksonomies comprise a resource for publishers. Provided that they are subject to a proper review process, they can be of considerable value as navigational aids to the literature. User input makes better products!

There are some features of **Web 2.0** that are already being used by scholarly publishers:

- **RSS (Really Simple Syndication)** includes blogs, news feeds, and podcasts – a collection of Web-based services used to provide frequently updated information. Readers register for a feed. The service presents the reader with content that is new since the previous time they checked.
- One type of **RSS** is the blog. Blogs are already commonplace. Many companies — not just publishers — are using them to find out what their customers really think, and to feed this information back into product development. In the journal sphere, they can point readers to content and invite discussion about it.
- While digital technology has been used in production for a long time, narrow niches of interest are now much easier to reach online. *The Long Tail* is a reality in journal usage, as it is in the sale of books via **Amazon**.

Web 2.0 throws down a challenge to publishers' management of copyright. Publishers have — not unreasonably, as it is the bedrock on which they base their businesses — been obsessed with protecting their intellectual property rights. As Web technologies have developed, this has come to be seen as simply limiting re-use and preventing innovation. Publishers may have to reconsider their position and are likely to lower the barriers to use as they recognize that benefits accrue from collective adoption of content. Creative Commons licenses show how this might be done.

Content or Function?

It has become almost a cliché to say that "content is king;" whoever controls the content controls the way it is used and paid for. I am not sure that this is true any more. And it certainly is a cultural attitude that inhibits publishers from taking a fundamental look at their business models.

It seems to me that the key to the future of the scholarly journal is to build functionality around the basic content. Readers are faced with more content, and less time to use it. That content may be freely available from repositories. So readers want tools that analyze and structure content in ways that make it useful to them. Publishers should add value to what they publish by adding workflow tools. **CSA Illustrata** enables searching for charts, graphs and illustrations in articles. The **Royal Society of Chemistry** has started to index images, table and compounds in its publications for search and download. Publishers have to adopt and adapt these technologies to their publishing, while maintaining the effectiveness and authority of the peer review process that underpins scholarly publishing.

My personal view is that publishers have much to do to understand and use these new technologies. The content itself is still important, but will almost certainly be less valuable in the longer run than the functionality they add to that basic peer-reviewed content: supporting datasets, taxonomies, deep indexing and linking to other relevant resources, searchability, tools for downloading, analyzing and manipulating data, facilities to build communities within the discipline that extend beyond the journal article, etc. There are already good examples of what can be done:

- the **Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)** has married its books and journals with the underlying economic data on which they are based and tools that enable the user to find, download and model data in a way that would simply be impossible in print;
- **Knovel** is an aggregator of engineering reference material published by a wide range of publishers. The whole database is deeply indexed both by keywords and by data values and properties. Data, physical and chemical properties, tables and graphs are held in such a way that the user can undertake complex engineering calculations in a matter of minutes — calculations that might take the best part of a day using paper-based information. It is widely used in corporate markets, where its value lies in enhancing productivity.
- **Alexander Street Press** publishes databases in the humanities — especially music, women's' studies and history. It sees folksonomies as a resource to update and improve its indexing on a continuous basis, and its use of **Web 2.0** techniques to build communities of interest, illustrate that this technology applies as much in the humanities and social sciences as in science, technology and medicine.

Readers are looking for ease of use and effectiveness: not just convenience, but efficiency, interactivity and applicability. They want to be able to apply the tools that come with the product to their own work. This is not just about saving time, but also about enhancing productivity. It is the creation of convenience, and the productive use of time, that will differentiate publishers from repositories.

Library Marketplace — Booksellers Who Blog

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Column Editor's Note: *Names of Websites and blogs are in* ***bold italic*** *and use their own given names. It is best to* ***Google*** *them to get to their sites. I will give the url where there is any confusion. — **JR***

In the last **"Library Marketplace"** column I tried to show some of the ways libraries could highlight their book collections through simple measures such as creating more exciting displays for their books or participating in an active social engagement with patrons. In this column I am going to do a 180, or rather a 90 degree turn, and focus on some of the Websites that booksellers of all types use that might be of interest to librarians. The Web has become a great way to publicize and sell books, so I will try to highlight some of the tools that publishers and booksellers utilize to explore the marketplace and to connect to it.

Many of the vendors and publishers I spoke to for this column said that they depend mainly on Listservs and password protected Websites, as is to be expected in the commercial sphere, where there is a fee for access to such valuable information. Some of the bigger publishers even have internal news services to keep them up to date on industry news and trends. In addition, many publishers indicated that they were mainly concerned with electronic rights issues and licensing of their products and so paid more attention to licensing sites. Sound familiar? I will try to touch on some of those, but will mainly try to point out free sites dealing purely with books that will be of interest to booksellers as well as librarians.

Neilsen Books Scan and ***Pub Alley*** are two of the major tools used by publishers to keep track of their books in the marketplace and to

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