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At Brunning: People & Technology: At the Only Edge that Means Anything/How We Understand What We Do

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At the Only Edge that Means Anything / How We Understand What We Do

by **Dennis Brunning** (E Humanities Development Librarian, Arizona State University) <dennis.brunning@gmail.com>

Amblin through Charleston...

Patron-driven access continues to occupy conference presentations. At the recent **32nd Charleston Conference** — as always a richly-rewarding and entertaining learning vacation, timed for late lowcountry autumn — the chock-full sessions and many eager attendees could pick among dozens of eBook presentations. Granted, as one perceptive speaker put it, what do we know after almost twelve years of academic eBook availability? Well, the numbers are now coming in, and they are hinting that in cash-sensitive times, a just-in-time selection may well take some pressure off book budgets. Encouraged by some vendor support and innovation in the PDA space, attendees caught glimpses of how this is working out.

We also learn that most of us consider these efforts baby-beta steps toward a brave new world that puts the user at the collections wheel and must have publishers and distributors scrambling to SWOT at analyses of PDA's impact on what they do and how they do it.

One of these is the open access eBook. Yes, a spark yet to become a flame is the notion that information in book format wants to be free. A librarian and eBook publisher went so far to favor removal of digital rights management from eBooks to foster greater access and ease of use. At the beginning of the eBooks decade, this green OA argument may have received little attention. Even now, academic libraries by practice are square in the center of limited-access as a model of the way we do business. Of course, the seller has always managed the DRM for security, legal, and business reasons. To remove DRM is a shift and a dilemma. It's a give-away which benefits the user — high-quality, edited, authored books. What's left for author and publisher is up for grabs.

Fortunately, most of the book OA suggests variations on the gold theme. Authors pay to publish; readers consume freely. **Eric Hellman's** Unglue It project relies on the kindness of crowd-sourced donors as one way of paying rights holders to bring books back out of print. The **OAPEN Foundation**, based in the UK, works with libraries, authors, and publishers to create a sustainable open access model for academic books. They manage, for example, the DOAB, the Directory of Open Access Books, which, like the Directory of Open Access Journals, helps users find open access content.

Success begets success, and open access initiatives, new funding models — will need adoption in fundamental numbers. A glimpse into trends was provided by two Claremont Schools faculty who compared

a recent survey of academic eBook editions to that of a 2008 survey.

In 2008, **Jason Price** and **John McDonald**, the authors, found that only about 20% of five academic libraries' book content were available from the eBook aggregator marketplace. Moreover, only 4% to 15% of eBook content was available from the four major vendors — **EBL**, **ebrary**, **EBSCO (Netlibrary)**, and **MylLibrary**. The survey included 34,000 titles.

In 2012, the electronic editions of available titles now were running at just under 40%, and providers covered 50% of available titles. Interestingly enough, the audience guessed correctly the growth in the marketplace. Conclusion: we're smart, and academic eBooks are a trend! The authors also commented on the value of subscribed backlists through the aggregators. They also mentioned the potential of the **HathiTrust** and/or **Google** lighting up their scanned titles. This part was less convincing and clear but, hey, it appears we have good horse sense in these areas, so let the electricity flow.

These and other open access book initiatives in lively discussion and debate at the conference promise a future of innovative approaches to eBooks that continue its evolution.

Certainly **Google**, no newcomer to innovation, continues to set user's expectations of easy and relevant search. Plenary speaker, **Anurag Acharya**, Lead Engineer **Google Scholar**, reviewed his eight-year effort to build the Web's scholarly search engine.

That an important **Google** employee was speaking in public about **Google** is, frankly, astonishing. Few venture forth from the **Google-Plex**, adhering to the general principle that what is good for **Google** is good for the world — human feedback, well, there is no link for that.

Ancharya, aka the **Google Guy**, spoke softly yet directly on the ends and means of **Google Scholar**. **Google Scholar** seeks to index all scholarly content posted to the Internet and link to the actual documents. Although sophisticated citation and keyword algorithms are central to the process, even more essential is open access. Problems that plagued **GS** over the years — pay-walls, fire walls, and library budgets unable to afford total access, become moot under open access.

We'll have more on this in a future **ATG** as **Mr. Acharya** has agreed to a Q&A once he returns from a long-deserved vacation with his family in India.

As the Internet in libraries revolution enters its third decade and as the players and

stakeholders settle into increasingly tighter and mightier Web kingdoms, this mature phase of capitalism relies more heavily on lawyers. Lawyers negotiate and nail down the buyouts and mergers; lawyers draw the lines on competition and distribution of the spoils.

No better guide to these juridical times than **Bill Hadley**, an intellectual property attorney from Chicago whose presentations on IP law are a popular feature of the conference. Never a dull moment as **Bill** humorously summarizes the year in IP law and how it impacts librarianship. So what went on this year?

Bill's take on the **HathiTrust's** claim of full-text indexing with snippet displays as transformative use should give us pause. He wondered aloud just how the bench would treat the indexes at the end of an academic book. Is the index enough of a finding tool to diminish the elephant's claim that full scanning represents a transformative finding tool?

Whether **Bill** is right or wrong it's great to hear in such an entertaining and brief fashion someone taking the air out of the copyright levelers argument. One hears so much from one side how the system is broken it is enjoyable to learn that perhaps law can sort it out in a way that is fair for everyone.

But where **Bill** had only a few minutes to impart humor and wisdom, please read and buy **Laura Gasaway's** collected columns on librarians and copyright. Culled from her long-standing **ATG** column, **Laura** answers key copyright questions for librarians. Her book is a timely and valuable guide and primer to copyright law and practice for librarians. She doesn't mince words; she doesn't get mired down in convoluted ideological claims based upon utopian visions of information and a free society. Basically librarians asked her whether it was okay to do this or that — in the hundreds of daily situations we work with. In tweet-like simplicity, **Laura** answers our questions. Bravo, **Laura**, and thanks for signing copies and answering questions!

We did have a visit from four Provosts — two from small colleges, two from behemoth systems — to fill us in on provostian thinking about libraries and librarians. How this got put together deserves a separate article; certainly Charleston as a destination played its insouciant role. However, the upbeat and dynamic presenters gave us entertaining and on-point observations of the provost's role and how we can work with them.

As **Donald Hawkins**, our esteemed conference blogger wrote, most of us do not know what provosts do. One could also easily add, we don't know how they think either. But they were entertaining and should take the show on the road.

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Your Links:

- https://www.dropbox.com/s/tmcb0kxghpu3rrw/open_and_shut_case_Parker_Chesler_Bernhardt.pdf
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Downloads from the Zeitgeist: the Shape of Things to Come....

Where are my flying cars? If you've asked yourself this lately, well join the club. In the 1950s, quite possibly to take our minds off the duck-and-roll drills practiced to shield ourselves from the mushroom cloud of the eve of destruction, futurists, riffing on rapid developments in the technology of air and ground travel, proposed the genial union of flight and drive. There we were, a smiling nuclear family of four, out for a Sunday afternoon drive and flight. General Aviation never seemed easier in the cloudless skies of the future.

Did anyone promise librarians and our patrons the library equivalent of "flying cars?" Cynics among us might say the journal publisher's "Big Deal" had enough conflation of fiction and reality to provide the necessary lift. Like the old house lifted into the skies in the animated film *Up*, the house, the kid, and the grumpy old man may seem like library, library user, and librarians, while the rich evil guy may be Elsevier or its current surrogate ACS. We've got to admit, though, the Big Deal thrilled us before it chilled us, and the prospect of having it all strikes us as a special bibliographic hyper-fixia consistent with flying cars.

Or should we nominate **Google Scholar**? Recently *The Charleston Advisor* awarded the search engine with its vanishing product award. In 2011 **Google Scholar**, once featured prominently in **Google's** top products, disappeared into the simply "More" where **Google** products reside in reduced use and purpose. We're told that it was a corporate decision by **Google's** lead engineer who spoke at the **32nd Charleston Conference** in early November. This probably means its use and user count simply didn't ring **Google's** algorithmic bells enough to warrant valuable first-screen positioning. So now it's still there but not standing on the shoulders of Giants — at least not the millennium era's version of a giant, the Gargantuan **Google**.

Our thought, though, on the library flying car — a futurist vision that might have been a contender — travels technology by way of **Vannevar Bush's** Memex and **Ted Nelson's** Hypertext. In the August 1945 issue of *Atlantic Monthly*, **Bush** wrote in "As We May Think" about computing machines that would relate objects of information to one another so knowledge would reveal its intrinsic and extrinsic relatedness. What was once isolated in books, articles, and other knowledge containers would finally be retrievable based on relationships to each other. **Ted Nelson** took this one step further in his notion of hypertext — documents themselves would be composed of links to related documents in new and interesting ways.

Of course, now we have the World Wide Web and **Google Scholar's** take on a better search engine for library content. Unfortunately, we need only a few minutes with it to learn that problems persist especially in the world of woe of broken or misdirected URL links. Instead of appropriate copy we may have the "just-good-enough" copy. Because **Google Scholar** fails to deliver, we are in need of new

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and costly delivery services, socially-mediated help, and our own blogs, tweet streams, and Facebook "likes" to argue for open access. Now open access would resolve many of these problems, and in a perfectly realized world of free information **Google Scholar** would indeed work magic. But that isn't the case. First three links good enough in a **Google Scholar** search? Yeah, we're not taking off soon in any flying car.

Your Links:

- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memex>
- <http://research.microsoft.com/en-us/collaboration/focus/cs/memex.aspx>
- http://www.livinginternet.com/w/wi_nelson.htm 🐼

Random Ramblings
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guides for LGBT lifestyles and health, sex education, birth control, evolution, sex before marriage, positive views of non-traditional adult sexual activities such as adultery and swinging, and the topics already mentioned above. I would suspect that some librarians have problems with representing both sides of issues such as gun control and abortion when these issues would offend a large proportion of their library users.

In conclusion, do I think that this brief article will have any effect upon the celebration of Banned Books Week and other similar efforts throughout the year? Of course not. The publicity that libraries and intellectual freedom get from the media is too important to overlook. What I want is some recognition that support for banned books is the easy part. Banned books are only a portion of the spectrum of issues concerned with intellectual freedom. Librarians have an obligation to support the information needs of their users — even on highly controversial topics. A commitment to intellectual freedom should look beyond the easy part — banned books — to support these difficult decisions. 🐼