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## At Brunning: People & Technology

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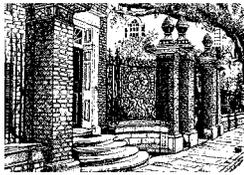
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## @Brunning: People & Technology

### 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>

#### Annals of Search: Your Library Ain't Wal-Mart

*If Apple produces a TV this year, as rumor has it, you can be sure it will be too simple for stupid people to cope with. One day I will understand why the more intelligent and busy people are, the more they demand simplicity.*  
— **Jonathan Margolis**, *Technopolis* column, "FT's How to Spend It"

Let's admit it, Google provides reliable library search under special and limited circumstances. Google Scholar has ingested most of the STM literature and spews forth gigabytes of links to published science. Reference aggregators, like Wikipedia, Ehow, IMDB post and re-post human knowledge (and opinion on that knowledge), provide Google search results with decent ready-reference information. Over Google's lifespan, these results have become good when they are good and bad when they are bad. Welcome to the post-library world.

More often than not — and their earnings depend on the former — Google offers up personal and customized results for us especially as they match what their advertisers have bought keyword rights to. The right words will get sponsored advertisements (usually the big guys), text ads (for the little guys), and clus-

tered results. Google reserves the latter for its products — Google maps to local businesses, Google YouTube videos, and Google images.

If this seems Google-centric, indeed it is. Recently, the Feds hired a winner-takes-all litigator to take on Google in a "search restraint of trade" lawsuit. Right now, Google finches not. Google's major defense is that they follow a search industry standard called native or organic result. What **Paul Harvey** used to call "the rest of the story."

Our search habits play an important role in what results Google shows us. Since Gmail's introduction in 2002, whose email search system evolved from Google's spell-checker, Google has devoted much effort to personalize our searches. Each search we do factors in location, search history, click history, and click-through history, to supply us with results that are as uniquely ours as a machine can make them.

In short, behind the scenes, Google is doing it all. For us. Along the way, Google may be making us stupid searchers to improve our searches.

Now that Google has become a content provider, they join the e-commerce crowd in wanting us to hang out as long as possible on

a site. The click-through era is over. Google seeks (or should we say "searches") a Wal-Mart shopper who, having taken the time, effort, and gas to motor on over to the shop-a-polis, is ready to spend. Just as Wal-Mart works hard to have you stick around, hunting the miles of aisles for bargains, impulse buys, and stuff you may not need but feel you have disposable income for, Google wants your time and attention online.

The strategy then is to organize a Wal-Mart shopping trip as an enjoyable yet time-consuming experience. Wal-Mart doesn't reward the convenience shopper who drops in just for a six-pack. Online and off-line, retailers strive to provide you a shopping experience that gets you to stay and shop — as long and as often as possible. In the virtual world this takes the shape of endlessly distracting web design that gets you to click here, mouse rollover there — there and there.

How ironic then our habit of pondering easier library sites. Users answer our surveys with comments that our sites are too confusing, too layered with links to destinations they should be on ten seconds ago. We err, it seems, to the wrong stickiness.

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Over the last few years our industry has responded to this with discovery services. These are search engines which leverage features existing in databases yet simplify search by providing a single index which covers a wide array of subscribed content.

Discovery relies on an industry of aggregated content and online publishers who provide basic indexing information openly. Theoretically it merges the best of say Google Scholar with large content sets like **EBSCOhost** or **ProQuest** databases. Another key feature is openurl database software which will match up article found with article.

Does it work? Often it depends on what we mean by work. If we mean instant search gratification, which Google offers a billion times a day, it works. If we mean purchase by academic libraries — well, yes, they are doing a brisk business.

The typical academic library is a Wal-Mart of product. In our case, academic content, but all the same a rich intellectual world that deserves the comparison to a big retail outfit. It is an Amazon of Intellect. Unfortunately all of us want convenience, simplicity, universal access, and savings in time and effort.

So our stickiness, our time on task, doesn't work for us the way Wal-Mart's does. Our strategies can never be the same. So why obsess on quick discovery and easy linking? Discovery seems all about Teflon search—an antistickiness.

Everyone but us is into stickiness—time on-site. Don't go, click on this. Google wants you, Bing wants, Amazon wants you — to stay, click, link, and buy. Even our journal publishers give only enough information to search engines to get users over to their Website where the real discovery begins.

Let's aim for stickiness at our library Websites. But not bad stick where the user is so confused by our levels of links, but the stick that good search and linking tools provide. Right now we have disparate pieces held together by iffy systems. Let's reinvent openurl to put an article's verified link into our meta-data. Let's encourage real-time clustering in our discovery software which spell it out immediately — we have these eBooks on your topic, we have these articles, these are the peer-reviewed articles.

Our users will be rewarded. They will be spending time, yes, but it will be worth it. Like a trip to Wal-Mart.

#### Your Links:

<http://www.howtospendit.com/#!/articles/7137-technopolis-philips-saeco-xelsis>

*This part is free — an iPad-type online catalog in your browser!*

<http://searchengineland.com/how-google-instant-autocomplete-suggestions-work-62592>

<http://joabordalo.com/articles/2011/01/19/the-website-stickiness-paradox>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/27/technology/google-antitrust-inquiry-advances.html?ref=business>

## Hearts and Minds

The Big Data people are ramping up programs and polemics for management and storage of raw information of higher education's research and discourse. In public proposals, especially in comments to the federal government on the *Research Act*, the word "extinction" appears often enough to give pause to mainstream librarians. If we don't do something about Big Data in libraries, we face the dodo's fate.

Of course, those for big data in libraries do not mean extinction in the Darwinian sense. This is more the Spenglerian/Toynbee/Wired meaning. We face social extinction if Big Data isn't curated within our professional and physical walls.

For a long time, science writing ignored data publishing. Probably because there was no easy way to find, share, and display the data. Now we have the Internet, and supposedly we leaped light-years ahead from when scientific data was registered on paper, punch cards, magnetic tape, and servers. All that is now on the World Wide Web. For us. Click.

The metaphors that depict the data Web include water (flood, drown), sound (signal to noise), mining (digging), and hydraulics/plumbing (filtering.). Presumably, librarians have the ability, capacity, and mind to organize all the data the metaphors suggest are overwhelming. We can swim with the Big Data sharks.

But do we have the heart to do this?

We do, but the threatening tone of big data rhetoric in libraries doesn't help to put us in the right frame of mind to take it on. As Big Data threatens our profession we find ourselves with meager budgets, thinning ranks,

Rather than data bombs and shelling, we need the warm fuzzies of how this will right the supposedly sinking ship of libraries. More money would help. In our pockets and in our retraining budgets — yeah, that's the ticket.

What we don't need, though, is being told we are out the door especially by IT types who want to take over library budgets and offices. Their own offices have moved to India or to companies like **Pearson** and **Amazon**.

#### Your Links:

<http://www.cni.org/topics/digital-curation/national-status-of-data-management/>

#### Circling: a Wellness Program

You've heard of planking. Where people arrange themselves prone and horizontal

from one object to another to make a bridge of themselves to two points in the natural world? Then upload the photograph to the virtual world?

Well, this isn't it. Circling is volunteering to reshelve books. Preferably, for weeks on end just to get the feel of books coming and going in the library.

Summer is a good time. Life has slowed down. Crickets can be heard in the dreamy quiet of the paperbound environment. Here you are alone with your thoughts and a cart full of books. It's like camping without the bears or mosquitoes.

The more diverse the LC call numbers, the better. The journey from A to Z may take you to multiple locations. You'll be like the character in Sartre's novel *Nausea* who is reading his way through the library's alpha-

betical arrangement of books. It will be a good nausea as you skim the anthologies in the As, encounter the beautiful minds in the Bs, and experience the social through the Hs even as it gets weird in the HQs. By the time you finish your poetry Ps, your summer

will be complete before the sorrowful Zs of our gentle yet troubled profession.

Stretching before, during, and after is highly recommended. The physics of space require the big books to be placed high, beyond a mere mortal's reach. A stacks ladder or stool comes in handy, but you still have that reach. Warm up those delts, keep the pecs tight, and be sure to loosen the neck muscles.

Oh, the dust allergies. If so afflicted, be sure to take your Zircam, Claritin — or the closest generic. As librarians, we know you are mostly broke, so go with the cheaper but as-useful generics. Circling will remind you that books are decaying all of the time; like uranium's half lives, our books possess shelf lives. Lately, these lives, especially those measured by the dust, work against them. But in the stacks, among the evidence of our careful collecting, you can appreciate a book's life on the shelf and its necessary and intimate relationship with its neighbors. Circling serves as a little memento of this.

At heart, Circling is all about a wellness journey we can take; perhaps must take. Connect less with Facebook friends than our friends, the books. Break time...

#### Your Links:

<http://www.planking.me/>

<http://www.kentucky.com/2011/08/13/1843570/defacing-property-gets-planking.html#ixzz1V64GSnr>

<http://don.citarella.net/tag/reshelving/> 🐼