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

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To Blog or Not To Blog — Why Scholars Blog

by Pat Sabosik (General Manager, ACI Scholarly Blog Index; Phone: 203-816-8256) <psabosik@aci.info>

There are a lot of reasons why scholars blog, not the least of which is to advance their research and refine their craft of writing and to clearly communicate their ideas in their field. Digital presence and reputation are also key drivers, especially for younger scholars and scientists. Their digital footprint will be bigger and broader than today’s scholars. Scholarly blogs, once considered ephemeral, are now becoming part of the scholarly record and an important component of a scholar’s work. Let’s look further into these topics.

Digital Footprint

Young scientists coming into the field are digital natives. They have an affinity for technology, are socially connected, and are driving a sharing economy. Blogging and a range of Internet-enabled social connections like Facebook, Twitter, Academia.edu or ResearchGate are a regular part of their lives. A social presence is important and can help scholars gain recognition in their field. Scholars need a digital presence to be discoverable; that’s where their peers, mentors, and funding agencies will find them. Using social media smartly, particularly blogging where commentary can be expanded, can help benefit the young scholars and bring attention to their work.

Digital Reputation

Digital commentary has to have substance as young scholars build their reputation as burgeoning experts in their fields. Commenting on trends in a thoughtful way through a scholar’s blog goes a long way towards building that digital reputation and showing mastery of an idea or topic — essentially, what does a scholar want to be known for? Maintaining profiles and activity on key social media resources becomes important as scholars build their digital resume and social presence.

Interdisciplinary Scholarship

How many scholars actually use blogs or social media? Will scholarly blogs be read and referenced? According to a Pew – AAAS study, “47% of AAAS scientists have used blogs or social media to discuss or follow science, 24% have blogged, 19% regularly follow blogs and 12% regularly follow Twitter in order to keep up-to-date.” Given the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of science, nearly 92% of AAAS scientists, in the same Pew study, “read a journal article outside of their primary specialty area in the past year and 57% published a study with a multidisciplinary team.” The same use of blogs and interdisciplinary practices can be traced to scholars in the social sciences and the humanities.

Funding and Publishing

In the same Pew study, 83% of AAAS scientists report “that obtaining federal research funding is harder today [2014] than it was five years ago.” Industry funding and private foundation funding are also down. “Concerns about adequate funding are widely shared among scientists of all disciplines and employment sectors.”

Limits in funding have put restrictions on research and potentially the number of traditional outlets for publishing research results. In fast-developing fields like the life sciences, researchers are often reporting on trends in advance of, or in some cases instead of, journal articles and can be found side-by-side with journal articles in the major discovery engines such as ExLibris Primo, Ebsco Discovery Service, OCLC WorldCat, and ProQuest Summon. This next generation of scholars will continue to push the boundaries of scholarly communication through blogs and other forms of scholarly discourse.

@Brunning: People & Technology

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

by Dennis Brunning (Associate University Librarian, Arizona State University) <dennis.brunning@gmail.com>

Annals of Analytics: Usage Data

Library use is like Donald Trump’s delegations. We’ve got plenty but somehow they get no respect.

My own library drowns in numbers. We’ve got millions and millions of article downloads. eBook use isn’t too shabby either.

Why be surprised, the industry and its customers, librarians, are a massive knowledge engine.

Yet ask anyone in academia, even high mucky mucks, and everyone says they get all their information from Google. Thank you.

What’s the deal?

Well, borrowing from David Weinberger’s observation that there is a library size hole in the Internet we can state a corollary. There is a huge leak in publisher Websites, flowing from Google, pooling in Dropbox and other cloud redoubt.

Check with your usage people, I’ll bet numbers, especially STM downloads, are huge. Who is even tracking views? Requests arrive from many places, mainly Google Scholar. So why doesn’t this use lift all ships, that is, get our users to applaud us?

Our users, myself included, search Google and find much library content on the open Web. We can blame Sci-Hub, but c’m on, it’s much bigger than that. Sci-Hub easy? You’d have to be a professional skip tracer to find it. Find it at best, it’s bad aggregation. It’s about as easy to use as the “tear here” instructions on convenience store aspirin packets.

Our stuff is easier to open than bitty aspirin packs, often (sorry OA advocates) as economically priced, and more often than not the results of a highly efficient search engine.

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Pat Sabosik is the General Manager of the ACI Scholarly Blog Index, an editorially selected and curated collection of scholarly blogs covering all academic disciplines. Pat will be moderating a panel discussion: “Why We Blog – Reshaping Research, Captivating Tales from Academic Bloggers.” During the upcoming Charleston Conference October 31st to November 5th, in Charleston, SC.

Sources

Improving eBooks

The focus of question 24 (1,302 respondents) was improving the usability of eBooks. It is similar to questions asked in 2008 and 2011 (see Table 9); however, the 2016 question included three options that were not in the earlier questions — “Fewer restrictions on downloading,” “Improved accessibility,” and “Better search.” Apart from these three additions, which ranked second, third, and fourth in 2016, the rankings were almost identical for the features held in common among the surveys. The top rank in all three surveys was “More titles in my subject area.”

The selection pattern in the smaller set of factors in the earlier questions separated into two groups with the top group garnering about two-thirds of the votes and the other group important to only about a third of the students. The top three factors in the 2008 and 2011 surveys lost an average of 4 points each by the 2011 survey. The decline in concern could be the result of advances in these areas — increased numbers of titles at academic libraries and improved access through collections like Google Books and HathiTrust as well as increased flexibility in printing and copying.

The 2016 survey had a gradual spread of selection percentage that was roughly 10 points on average below the results of the earlier surveys. The drop could indicate improvements in the areas. The only factor to switch positions in the 2016 survey were “Better training and instruction” and “multimedia capabilities.”

Table 9 – Preferences for improvements to eBooks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>2008 %</th>
<th>2011 %</th>
<th>2016 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More titles in my subject area</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer restrictions on downloading</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved accessibility</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better search</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less restrictions on printing and copying</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More current titles</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better e-book readers</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better training and instruction</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multimedia capabilities</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Amount Read for an Assignment

Students (1,281 respondents) in question 25 selected one option from a listing of portions of an eBook that they typically read when doing research or completing assignments. Just over 59% reported (Table 10) reading a chapter or more. Only 5% selected the entire eBook. The question does not exclude e-textbooks. A fair percentage of students are now using e-textbooks, which generally require reading about a chapter or more. The question also does not specify a time frame, which implies a portion of an eBook for a given assignment. But, it can also be understood as one sitting or throughout a term.

Table 10 – Portion of eBook typically read

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than one chapter but less than the entire book</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 5 pages but less than a chapter</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One chapter</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5 pages</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The entire book</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t read eBooks</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just the table of contents</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reading Devices

Question 26 asks students (1,295 respondents), “When you have to read an eBook for a longer period of time (i.e., more than 20 minutes) how do you usually read it? (Multiple Selections).” Nearly half the time (45%) students are reading on a desktop or laptop computer, tablets (18%), print outs (13%), a smartphone (12%), and an e-reader (8%). Nearly three quarters of the students (73%) in question 27 (1,292 respondents) report preferring to download and read rather than read online and 21% prefer online reading.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Options</th>
<th>Response %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On a laptop computer</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On a tablet</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On a desktop computer</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printed out</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On a smartphone</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On an ereader, such as Kindle or Nook</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wouldn’t read an eBook for longer than 20 minutes</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Instruction

In 2008, online tutorials ranked highest with 62% of students selecting them as the “most effective support and training tools for learning how to find and use eBooks.” Tutorials continued to rank number one with 65% of the vote in 2011. In-person instruction and online help pages continued in the 2nd and 3rd slots but they switched places and swapped 4 points. Training videos, paper guides, and online chat all received less than a third of the vote between the two earlier surveys with paper guides losing 3 points and training videos and online chat both gaining points.

In 2016 question 28 (1,282 respondents) found 56% of students selecting in-person instruction as “extremely or very effective” as the top selection. Online tutorials was in second place with 48%. The change was accompanied by an increase in the percentage of students selecting “training videos” from 2008 (22%) to 2016 (44%), which are now online in place of tutorials. Therefore, the training videos and online tutorials might best be understood together, which would then account for scores of 84% in 2008, 87% in 2011 and 88% in 2016.

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Still the “got it Google” bias or hyperbole lingers. What we need is the right data. User data is the money machine for Web companies. We need to know where they are coming from. Good that they find our content through our search engines; great if they find our content from any search engine. Fundamental if we learn we’ve poured billions into the greatest open access repository the world has ever known.

Annals of the Reader’s Advisor(y) Bookbub

Bookbub gets me. Yes. Everyday, around 9am, Bookbub emails me at Gmail and I get a half dozen eBooks — mostly Amazon and Apple iBooks — recommended. The suggestions are okay but when combined with a steep discount — those impulse buys at $1.99 are addicting. Less than two bucks beats library free. Even if it is a library eBook there’s so much work involved in choice, in logging on, in remembering to go the library Website. Go to the library itself? Please!

And Bookbub gets me in no way that I get myself. It’s not Amazon’s know-too-much about me approach that suggests titles from other readers. I can only sing “you ain’t me.” And Amazon doesn’t know $1.99 unless we are talking about self-published books. Clicked on any of these? You’ve really got to enjoy reading to read these eternal beta versions. There is no shortage of creative intent in Kindletland.
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acquisitions? Is this financially feasible? How does it influence or how is it influenced by any growth of truly collaborative collection initiatives?

- How will resource sharing change?
- Do libraries and library consortia need to begin to evolve a new infrastructure to support resource sharing on a larger scale? What role might increased digital delivery play in efficient operations?

And, the beat goes on…… We look forward to the continued evolution of shared print projects and to working together as a community. Libraries or library consortia interested in addressing these questions or joining EAST as part of the second cohort should reach out to Susan at <sstearns@blc.org> or Anna at <aperricci@blc.org>.

Endnotes
1. EAST’s initial focus has been monographs though journals and serials are in scope for EAST and planned for the future.
2. A title set is an SCS term used to describe all the holdings of a particular title. Across a collective such as EAST, a title set can have one or more associated title holdings.

Downloads from the Zeitgeist

Negative Rates — Central banks throughout the world are lending money to banks at zero to minus zero interest rates. This quantitative easing keeps a lead lid on inflation and makes money cheap. The idea is to promote economic growth while holding inflation at bay.

Unfortunately, growth in jobs or capital expansion has occurred; instead companies hold on to cash only to spend while buying up competitors.

Negative rates are the new normal. It explains the M&A in our industry. This is good business; as about the only customers for many of these companies, we should expect no less. We should also expect some price relief. Or some awesome tech advancement at modest cost.

Lo and Behold — sounds biblical but deployed by Werner Herzog as the title of a new documentary on the Internet, it’s a play on the first message sent via the Internet. The time and place was UCLA engineering, room 3041. A military grade steel case server stands tall and 1950s-ish in a corner. There. UCLA. 1950. Yet to be released, nevertheless the good parts flow as snippets all over said web. Self-defined a non-user, Herzog sees the Internet as an extreme environment capable of social media’s “massive, naked onslaught of stupidity” to a once-in-a-millennium existential event. Herzog is after ecstatic truth of what most of us take for granted not the accountant’s truth of a Waze estimate of commute time. “Have the Thai monks stopped meditating? They all seem to be tweeting…”

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demanding, the rewards are worth the work. If this course of action, ongoing review, is occasionally challenging or assessment, and a commitment to delivering collections as a service.

is entirely dependent on interdepartmental collaborations, a culture of and assess the collection holistically. The success of these processes and the annual serials review project offer openings to actively cultivate investment) as was never possible previously. Both the database review process, it is assured that decisions are defensible and data-informed. Statistics, title lists, submission forms, and links to past review projects are all featured on the site. A blog dedicated to the serials review project is the primary method for technical services to inform public services of newly uploaded statistics on the intranet site, changes in deadlines, or other pertinent serials related information. Internal technical services discussions regarding licensing and technical requirements is documented on a group site dedicated to technical services communications.

The annual serials review project experiences constant improvements based on participant feedback. One major concern last year was that faculty who begin their tenure at the university usually arrive on-campus in August, which traditionally has been too late to participate in the review project for upcoming changes for the following year. A special review was held in October where new faculty could select titles to add to the collection from a preselected list of publishers. With a shortened timeline, a preselected list of publishers with which we had existing licenses was essential for licensing to be completed before the subscriptions began the following January. This project garnered praise from new faculty, and the intention is to continue this special review for new faculty.

It is challenging to commit to review as a default, but through the implementation of both the database review process and the serials review process, it is assured that decisions are defensible and data-informed. Documentation of these processes creates opportunities for internal assessment of collection efficiency, delivery time, and ROI (return on investment) as was never possible previously. Both the database review and the annual serials review project offer openings to actively cultivate and assess the collection holistically. The success of these processes is entirely dependent on interdepartmental collaborations, a culture of assessment, and a commitment to delivering collections as a service. If this course of action, ongoing review, is occasionally challenging or demanding, the rewards are worth the work.

Morgan & Claypool's *Synthesis* and *Colloquium* Digital Libraries contain original, accessible e-Books of high-interest research and development topics in engineering, computer & information science, and the biomedical life sciences. These e-Books provide more synthesis, analysis, and depth than journal reviews and are time-saving entry points to new topic areas. Written and peer reviewed by experts they are useful for both teaching and self-study.

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GE — General Electric? — a smart series of TV ads sets young geek graduates against a world convinced that innovation is exclusive-ly about “digital.” An old school Dad cajoles his tall skinny coding graduate to lift Grandpa’s sledge hammer; same kid faces his friends insisting in vain that trains powered by GE turbine engines require intricate programming. The message: apps haven’t disrupted industry — don’t forget to send your CV to GE.

Wrong — the assumption that our predictions play out right may be wrong and all those forecasts may turn out some variation of wrong. Or so says Chuck Klosterman in his new book, *But What If We Are Wrong*. Klosterman’s thesis isn’t new — that we have no idea of what now will be important in the future or what will be wrong or plain forgotten. Chuck is a cultural critic so mainly he challenges us on such questions of how important rock music will be — is it here to stay or will the Beatles go the way of John Phillips Sousa — a side influence. Something to ponder as we work out our ideas of the library’s future.

Library Sized Hole in the Internet — Ever since Internet clairvoyant and pundit, David Weinberger, coined the phrase in a 2012 OCLC interview, I’ve kept my eyes peeled for said hole. I’m familiar with holes, real and metaphorical, by having dug many according to my parents, worked construction, dug foxholes in ROTC, and paid my dentist a mint for those holes called caries. Also found that philosophers concern themselves with holes as a peculiar form of absence. This I discovered on the Internet from sources I would describe as library sources. I learn that we look more closely at things when they disappear. Holes are a great place for things to disappear. Are we looking closely?

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aging the ubiquity of small portable devices to keep this conversation alive and to broaden the audience of people who are participating. We are constantly looking for ways to bring more people into the conversation and reach a broader audience, and I think the trends are very promising.

One of the things that interested me at the SSP meeting was the number of corporation representatives who approached us and asked if we would be interested in doing something like a team-building exercise. That is something that we would enjoy doing because CSI’s mission is to get people thinking more ambitiously and optimistically about the future. The role that books and publishing would play is obviously part of that conversation.

My personal research interests are looking at interdisciplinary collaboration and how to support people with very different backgrounds in collaborating and doing big ambitious projects. This project is a nice example. We had already talked about bringing representatives of the publishing community and authors together. Seeing the results of that is really exciting, and we are always looking for more opportunities.

DTH: I think this is a fascinating project and will follow it with interest. Do you have a newsletter or a way to keep people up to date with what is going on?

RW: You can sign up for a subscription to the newsletter on the CSI Website.

DTH: Thank you very much for taking the time to speak with me.

Donald T. Hawkins is an information industry freelance writer based in Pennsylvania. In addition to blogging and writing about conferences for Against the Grain, he blogs the Computers in Libraries and Internet Librarian conferences for Information Today, Inc. (ITI) and maintains the Conference Calendar on the ITI Website (http://www.infotoday.com/calendar.asp). He is the Editor of Personal Archiving: Preserving Our Digital Heritage, (Information Today, 2013) and Co-Editor of Public Knowledge: Access and Benefits (Information Today; 2016). He holds a Ph.D. degree from the University of California, Berkeley and has worked in the online information industry for over 40 years.

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Technology Doping — Olympic swimmers, especially the Gold Medalists, break records in waters stilled from drag producing waves over waters deep enough for optimum buoyancy. Smart pools through smart design. So why can’t our industry use the cheap money to produce smart UI, heck, smart content. Yeah, an Olympic award winning Website...

Edtech — so new it confounds spellcheck, so promisingly vast, Fintech places a global $5 trillion valuation, we’re talking an uberization of every teacher, professor, university administrator. Why? Well just about every educated parent feels a kid could learn more, faster, and safer with a computer and an Internet connection; every taxpayer lusted to be unburdened from subsidizing the teaching of someone else’s kid, and legislator’s can only smile. How? Oh, apps of course, free information, regulated access pipes, and interactive visual learning that scales. Never? Sure, every trillion dollar reference is either debt or Silicon Valley bubble, but, heh, here comes my Uber ride, while I refinance via Rocket, eating a Calzone Jimmy John’s delivered to me wherever...