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Standards Column -- Moving Libraries to a Web Services Environment -- Issues to Consider

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Learning Together: Vendors and Libraries Creating Better Processes to Improve Services — Presented by Mildred Jackson (Associate Dean for Collections, The University of Alabama), Beth Holley (Head of Acquisitions, University of Alabama), Janet Lee-Smeltzer (Head of Cataloging & Metadata Services, University of Alabama), Robin Champieux (Library Partnership Manager, Blackwell)

Reported by: Malcolm Q. Walker (SLIS Student, University of South Carolina) <malcolmqw@alumni.as.ua.edu>

This particular presentation dealt the collaboration between the University of Alabama Libraries and Blackwell. Jackson noted that her task was to implement ways to improve patron and service efficiency. Steps taken were to restructure the workflow for acquisitions and cataloging, yet more was done to address the costs. In particular funds were spent using OCLC; however, multiple features were not utilized. In short, the goals were to increase efficiency, improve ordering process, and to move the library forward. Champieux explained that Blackwell’s directive is to “define the present in order to identify opportunities for change and how to meet goals.” Holley commented on the changes in acquisitions citing that paper order requests have been eliminated. In its place a one-line order request was implemented — but that this form of ordering had been superseded by a multi-line form. Likewise, Lee-Smeltzer commented on the challenges in cataloging. Some of the changes consisted of improving the consistency of data, but that this form of ordering had been superseded by a multi-line form. Likewise, Lee-Smeltzer commented on the changes in cataloging. Some of the changes consisted of improving the consistency of data entry and improving the quality of search results through the Knowledge Bases and Related Tools working group, or KBART. The panelists all agreed that the practice can be made more efficient.

That’s all the reports we have room for in this issue, but we do have more reports from the 2008 Charleston Conference Watch for them in upcoming issues of Against the Grain. You may also visit the Charleston Conference website at www.katina.info/conference for additional details and to view a PDF file of the remaining reports which have not been published in print yet. — KS

Standards Column — Moving Libraries to a Web Services Environment — Issues To Consider

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In April, OCLC released the first iteration of a Web-based service for library management systems. This is the first salvo in what will likely become a radical transformation on how libraries manage their resources — both in print and digital forms — as well as their services. Much like many industries that are moving to hosted or “cloud”-based solutions, libraries are assessing the practicality of running their own complicated back-end office systems, their integrated Web-based user applications, all their discovery tools and the ever growing multitude of information management environments.

What is a Web Services Environment?

In this environment, an organization uses a third party service and their networked information resources to provide information technology, software and services, rather than owning and running all the services in-house. Industry has been moving in this direction for some time, generally referring to such vendors as application service providers (ASPs). A simple example is a Web-based document creation tool such as Google Docs that is used to replace desktop word processing systems.

One service that is frequently cited as an example of cloud-based services is salesforce.com. Organizations that rely heavily on sales teams, who are frequently on the road, need centralized contact and customer relationship management (CRM) software that is accessible from anywhere the sales rep happens to be. They have been turning to this service to provide it since it was launched in 1999. Lest one think that Web-based applications are a niche market in software, salesforce.com saw its 2008 revenues top $1 billion. Beyond sales management, other popular management systems in a Web environment are accounting — NISO, for example uses QuickBooks Online — Gmail to replace enterprise email systems, Skype for telephony, or even Amazon’s Elastic Compute Cloud that provides processing capacity.

The benefits of using a remote, Web-based platform for information services can be tremendous. The company no longer has to purchase and manage costly servers and networking technologies or address the significant technical issues with controlling access or security, and applying the frequent and necessary software updates and hardware upgrades. Training costs for IT staff to stay current in an ever-changing field can be reduced or eliminated. New capabilities may be available faster as the customer base and competition can drive the supplier to implement new capabilities sooner than an organization might do so in-house.

OCLC’s Plans for a Web Environment Library Service Structure

For many years, people have seen the potential of applying the principles of Web computing to library management systems. Andrew Pace, formerly at North Carolina... continued on page 78
And! Can’t believe it! Just learned that the DVDs from the 2008 Charleston Conference have been recovered and will be loaded up shortly as soon as we check with speakers to see if we can put them on the Web. You may or may not remember that we had DVDs made of much of the Conference (the Plenaries especially) but the sound was non-existent when we played them. Well, our wizard technchmn, Chet Willis, has fixed all that! Can’t believe it! Hooray! Stay tuned.

www.katina.info/conference

The Interop09 conference at Los Alamos (www.mesur.org) and some of that group’s work on click streams and usage patterns to get a sense of the power (and financial opportunities) of large-scale meta analysis from crunching data in usage logs. What limitations (or lack thereof) are there on the uses the supplier can make with the data that is created from using its services.

This issue came to a head earlier this year with the release of OCLC’s new Proposed OCLC Policy for Use and Transfer of WorldCat Records (http://www.oclc.org/us/en/worldcat/catalog/policy/policy.htm). There was a significant outcry from many in the community about these proposed changes, including from ICOLC (http://www.library.yale.edu/consortia/statement-oclcrecorduse.htm), ARL (http://www.arl.org/news/pr/oclc-policy-20feb09.shtml) and others (http://dewey.library.nd.edu/mailing-lists/ngc4lib/). OCLC was forced by the community to withdraw the initial proposed terms and engage a Review Board on Principles of Shared Data Creation and Stewardship (http://www.oclc.org/us/en/worldcat/catalog/policy/board/default.htm).

There is a wide range of applications for which OCLC would like to use the data that it has received from the library community and there is a need to ensure that they have the rights to do so. However, the library community also has a desire to take advantage of the data that they supply to OCLC and that of others, from page 77