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International Dateline --

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ERMS Race
from page 94

her talk fascinating and a wonderful introduction to the subject.

The rest of the breakfast dealt with the Endeavor ERM product Meridian and the steps they are going through at Endeavor to develop the product. These guys are serious and the effort seemed systemic and well thought out. It was impressive.

Should each librarian who has tasks like Ms. Ballard’s design and build her own such database? Vendors are investing in developing these products because they feel there is a market for them, after all, should each librarian in this kind of job also be an expert in databases? Or can the vendors hire the experts to develop products that are easy to use and with useful features?

I went from this breakfast back to the various OPAC/ILS vendors and asked: do you have similar projects? All I talked to have things in the pipeline. I had hoped to have a list of who is doing what but I found that the whole area is in flux and concluded that things would change between now and the introduction of products. Indeed, a fair amount of the details I found out at ALA have already changed. Most product introductions seemed to be scheduled for early next year. However, there were things in common that I found in talking to the vendors.

I found these similarities between them:
1. They all claim that their products will be compliant with the Digital Library Federation’s “Electronic Resource Management Initiative” (ERMI) (http://www.diglib.org/standards/dlf-ermi.html). Let me quote from a paragraph that describes what the initiative attempts to do:

   “WHEN LIBRARIES ACQUIRE electronic resources from publishers or vendors, they must understand, record, transmit, and inform others about the many financial, legal, interrelational, and access aspects of these arrangements. The acquisitions and licensing processes are complex, publishers transmit this information to libraries in a variety of paper and electronic formats, and the number of licensed electronic products libraries are collecting is increasing rapidly. Such situations tend to spawn local, ad hoc fixes; what is needed, by contrast, is an industry-wide, standardized solution. The Electronic Resources Management Initiative (ERMI), an ongoing project of the Digital Library Federation (DLF), is creating such a solution.”

   It appears that this standard is not yet completely formalized because the “final report” is to be completed this summer and it is not available on the Website as of this writing. As a result, complying with it seems to be a goal the vendors have established but actual compliance necessity must await publication of the standard.

2. There is wiggle room in what the vendors are actually going to do because research is ongoing. There was a certain bit of everyone is doing everything and everyone is compliant but when there are few actual products to demonstrate, rather there are brochures, I thought that I better wait until the dates products were actually launched. As a result, the more I worked on this article, the shorter it got. I did see some demos, though. The Endeavor folks had screenshots and demonstrations of how aspects of the product will work but the SIRSI folks had an eye-popping live demo of what they were working on.

3. Will it be necessary to have purchased the OPAC/ILS of the vendor for a library to purchase the ERM product? Some vendors say their ERM product only works with the OPAC, some don’t and, hence, will be available as a stand-alone product. I bet the various ERM products to work best if you also own the OPAC/ILS from the vendor. However, every one of the OPAC/ILS vendors I talked to had an ERM product in development so I suspect there will be an option for you from your OPAC vendor.

4. The vendors I talked to are experimenting and testing in cooperation with libraries and these libraries are listed in their literature so there are operational prototypes being tested. These cooperating libraries will be a source of information if you are interested in seeing the unpolished products while they are being tested. The Endeavor folks are also using focus groups to decide which features to supply, so I am betting others are, too.

5. I believe that all will have a Web-based front end. The back ends seem to be various database engines.

According to information I collected, the following vendors have these products in process:

- VTLS — Verify (http://www.vtls.com/Products/verify.shtml)
- Dynix — Horizon Web Reporter. A white paper ERM — What is it & What Solutions Does Dynix Provide is available off its main page (http://www.dynix.com/).
- SIRSI — Director’s Station (http://www.sirs.com/Sirsproductsdirectorstation.html).
- Innovative Interfaces — Electronic Resources Management (http://www.ii.iit.edu/mill/digital..shtml#erm).

I heard nothing about pricing but we will know the answer to that question soon enough.

Adventures in Librarianship
from page 91

might remember that Ms. Kaacke won this same category last year with her entry “Funding.” Here is this year’s Most Indignant, “Lies.”

Aggregators say
They have everything you need. But we know better.
Finally the winner of the $20 prize for this year’s best haiku, “Fortitude” by Jason Thick, a cataloger with the Furtive County Library System.

MARC format changes.
Delimiters like hot sand.
You are not afraid.

Few poems we know reach this level of bravado and incisiveness. Mr. Thick intimates cerebral joy while giving one an almost physical sock to the belly. Reader, take heed of Jason’s words, be brave, and submit your haiku in next year’s Annual ATG Haiku Contest.

International Dateline —

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The whole Charleston enterprise has always, or at least has for many years, been international in approach both in its meetings and its publications. Most people, both outside and inside North America, tend to assume that most advances in the world of information that we all inhabit come from the US or even, more narrowly, from California or even Stanford. This is not an unreasonable assumption. However an international perspective is justified because local circumstances do enable some advances in the take up of e-resources to be made, which are not so easy to achieve in the complex, disorganized and even chaotic US academic scene. I have written in a previous “Dateline” about the impact of the JISC (the Joint Information Services Committee of bodies funding much of UK higher and further education) on the provision of digital content to the UK academic enterprise. In this issue, my aim is to give further information about the provision to this sector of e-books in particular, to point to some initiatives which may travel across the Atlantic and to offer some lessons for wider consideration.

My own particular interest is in e-monographs. A personal communication from a real expert suggests, “In some respects, e-monographs have been more or less ignored for two to three years, as the more pressing issues relat...
seen a massive take-up. Collections of learning materials in eBook form are slated as an area for future concentration, though there are special problems.

Some major reports have been commissioned, which make clear some of the pre-occupations of the group. They have international relevance. The most important is titled A strategy and vision for the future for electronic text books in UK further and higher education. There are some interesting predictions. It is suggested that, although the e-textbook scene is dominated at present by the big players of the print on paper book industry, new players will emerge and there will be a combination of digitization/conversion companies, Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) vendors and broadcasters. As online diverges from print, librarians could find a growing role in materials for e-learning. The report suggests that there could be some friction between academics and librarians in this context. Finally there are some interesting speculations about “chunking.” Students may want bits of books. Not only are there of course, licensing problems but the academic, as an author, may be in conflict over matters of integrity with the academic, as a user. One of the recommendations urges an awareness campaign to encourage metadata for “chunks.”

A second report, a little less rigorous and more of a quarry for ideas is on Promoting the Uptake of eBooks in Higher and Further Education. Like many librarians, for example Nancy Gibbs in a Charleston presentation and elsewhere, librarians and publishers have come to realize that eBooks need serious marketing. Those of us involved in putting journals online in the mid-1990s are reminded of the problems then, but in spite of all the current tensions, there is, in this instance, more collaboration than seemed possible then. The strategy of the EBWG is to work with publishers, and this is also recommended in the report. A summary statement predicts:

eBooks, if adopted in a widespread fashion, would provide an answer to some of the challenges currently faced by higher and further education.

EBWG also commissioned a report on eBook mapping. The authors are Chris Armstrong and Ray Lonsdale, who have made earlier contributions of excellence. What is available and what are the perceptions of what is available in different disciplines? This is just the early stages of the project that has yet to gain additional funding. A fourth report is on the availability of free eBooks. From the point of view of a publisher it is good that resources are not just valued because they are free. They have to offer appropriate quality.

One lesson learnt by the EBWG is that dealing with a wide variety of institutions is not easy. In practice, there is a continuum of institutions, not a clear break between different types and the needs of one institution may be very different from the needs of another with an apparently similar status. Offerings of e-resources have to be properly explained, made available to all, and sent to the right person at the right time of the year. There are also the various problems of integration into locally produced material that varies from institution to institution. How do you embed eBooks into a VLE in a way that can be covered by a license and which is also practical?

EBWG started in a reactive as well as a proactive mode. Publishers, who approached with vague ideas about a possible offering, were encouraged to develop an e-list and help with market research. Their offers were written to encourage them to get their acts together. These pump-priming activities, which may have had significant international impact, are being discontinued. The activities of the EBWG are to follow the procedures worked out after quite a bit of trial and error, by its e-journal equivalent. Details can be found at the NESTL site.

Librarians will be pulled to discover the collections of which publishers are of most interest. These and only these (in most circumstances) will be negotiated with — probably ten companies at the most. In the case of e-journals the ALPSP collection was given a wild card (as it were) because it was felt that the society publishers should be helped. In the eBook arena there is currently no such offering. Many might feel that it is a pity that the AAUP cannot provide a similar collection of e-monographs from its membership.

There must also be a question about the reliance on a subscription model. For publishers (at least, as far as e-monographs are concerned) it is likely to be the only model that has the possibility of being financially viable (see the reference to my own study above) but is another set of Big Deals the best route for libraries to take? JISC is certainly well aware of the need to emphasize selection and continued access, whatever the much-discussed Select Committee of the UK House of Commons made about them. As in so many of its judgements, this report is wrong on this score. However, is this the model to go for? Could JISC take a role in providing a template for subject bundling that cuts across the silos provided by individual institutions, while rewarding accordingly?

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