November 2013

Issues in Vendor/Library Relations -- Google

Editor

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Recommended Citation

DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4901

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University of Nevada, "the vast majority of older print journal and magazine articles are now housed in plastic boxes in the main stacks." This approach seems to satisfy patrons, and virtually eliminates the time spent seeking missing issues, adjusting location, holdings, and check-in records, not to mention the actual cost of binding. Staff hours freed by this are redirected to link and holdings maintenance for higher-demand e-journals. Remember, this approach needn't be adopted for all titles in order to save savings. Our "just say no" approach is meant to stimulate thought and short-term action, but it's also aimed at a long-term goal: keeping libraries cost-effective and relevant to their users and sponsoring institutions. All too often, academic libraries use the spectre of "long-term consequences" as an excuse for avoiding or deferring difficult decisions. Granted, for instance, the archiving problem is not fully solved. Does this mean that every library has to retain, check-in, and bind all its print journals—even if the hours dedicated to those tasks limit patron access to the electronic versions?

We're not in favor of corporatizations ruling the world. But a bottom-line does impose a discipline from which many libraries can benefit. Recognizing that every choice has a cost can help clarify priorities. Like corporatizations, or even Michael Moore, libraries cannot simply continue to grow, absorbing more tasks and resources. They must be managed, which sometimes means "just saying no."). While a long-range view offers much of value, it must be balanced against economic and practical limits. The organization must adapt. Setting priorities means some things will no longer be done. We believe those priorities should be set consciously, and in light of patron demand. Any "consideration of long-term consequences" should include hard questions about which tasks offer the most value to patrons now.

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**Issues in Vendor/Library Relations — Google**

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No self-respecting librarian would be caught dead today, of course, only using the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature. But, if you can find a set in your local Reference Department and if you can carry off a few volumes to a secluded corner of the room, it's easy to conduct an interesting little piece of research. Try to find the earliest entry for "Google." Which volume to choose? While by now it's become all but impossible to imagine life without everyone's favorite search engine, it's also hard to imagine the world prior to Google. How did we look things up in those days? Well, back to the question, which days? How about ten years ago, 1995? No, way too early. That was the year Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin met one another, as graduate students at Stanford. 1997? Warm, but still no sign of Google, which didn't launch until the year after.

Not until 1999, a mere six years ago, did the Readers' Guide need to create the subject heading, "GOOGLE (INTERNET SEARCH ENGINE)." That 1999 volume indexed all of two articles, one in Forbes, one in Fortune. The Forbes article, entitled "19K85%," asked if there were "any more exasperating experience than trying to search for something on the Web?" It indicted the all-too-literal AltaVista and a few of the other extant search engines. But "promising new software offers a bit of hope," said Forbes, whose reporter described three new search engines. Two of them, "Direct Hit" and "Clever," in the end proved not enough of either.

The third was Google. The 2000 Readers' Guide volume indexed ten articles—a quintupled literature—featured a new subject heading, "GOOGLE, INC.," and unveiled even a Google subheading, "Securities." By 2004, the year of Google's IPO, which brought in $1.7 billion—a good thing, that "Securities" subheading—the monthly paperbound volumes listed more articles than any annual accumulation had indexed to that point. Tracing the trajectory of Google: that's a job for the Readers' Guide. Don't try it in Google (where, in case you're interested, a search under "Google" returns over 243,000,000 results).

It took no time to put some of that new capital to work. The most audacious Google ideas, it turned out, had to do with libraries. In November was the announcement of "Google Scholar," a super-index to scholarly literature. Then, one month later, in an expansion of the "Google Print" program begun earlier—where Google results display excerpts from certain in-print books—the company announced a library digitization project on a scale that in pre-Google times, meaning just a little while ago, would have been unimaginable. Five of the world's leading research libraries—Stanford, Michigan, Harvard, Oxford's Bodleian, and New York Public Library—announced plans to work with Google to digitize their collections; for Stanford and Michigan, their entire collections, in- and out-of-print, about 15 million volumes together; between them. Digitization was nothing new to these libraries, but the Google scale was new. Michigan, for example, a pioneer, had on its own been digitizing fewer than 10,000 volumes per year. Google planned to digitize everything the library had, in just seven years.

The national press took up the story. Reporters interviewed librarians. The library press worked overtime. The news was manna to listservs and blogs, which carried all sorts of speculation on what Google would mean for the future of books and their publishers, of libraries and their users and non-users, of vendors and their customers, of just about everyone.

In January, when the American Library Association met in Boston, each of the U.S. libraries working with Google gave a brief report about their own site at a long-standing... 

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meeting officially known as “Chief Collection Development Officers of Large Research Libraries,” but in real life always called “Big Heads.” This regular Saturday morning session, never known as a headline-maker, was a good show in deed this time, the first public forum in the pro-
tension since the Google news broke. “Be nice to your undergraduates,” advised Mark Sandler, representing Michigan, alma mater of Larry Page, “you never know when they might succeed.”

Big Heads is usually the most collegial of groups, but in Boston Hethe Google libraries said there were some things they were not too happy to talk
about. It was like a Congressional hearing, as if they’d brought counsel. The many unanswered
copyright queries, sure to keep legal firms occu-
pied for many years, accounted for some of the
secretiveness. But each of the five partners of
Google, as well, has its own financial deal, its own
operational plans, and its own ideas, as yet not
fully formed, on how in the years ahead to make
best use of the bibliographic, technological, and
intellectual windfall with which they’ve been
blessed. They are partners with Google, not with
one another. Google’s ultimate plans, for that
matter, remain unclear too.

Matching these moments of non-disclosure on
the part of the Google libraries were one or two
slightly sour comments from non-participants. To
be fair, on a number of fronts at this point it’s no
sure thing that Google’s plan will succeed at all.
A good summary of maybe why not can be found
in a Library Journal interview with Alice
Prochaska, University Librarian at Yale, which
was not without the library profession’s approach
d by Google. Prochaska raised questions about the
risk of damaging books in such a mass digitiza-
tion project, on metadata standards, on the level
of duplication among the parallel projects, and on
the randomness of such a vast digital collection
versus digital content selected and packaged for
users. Don’t overestimate their commitment, Prochaska veri-
fied that the project is already an unqualified suc-
cess. “If I had a regret,” she told LJ, “I am that we
missed out on the publicity.”

Yale was not alone in public doubt. Ameri-
can Library Association president-elect Michael
Gorman, most notably, compared Google’s fast food
strategy to a traditional academic phenomenon and
is a wonderfully modern manifestation of the tri-
umph of hope and boosterism over reality.” In a
story that played everywhere, Jacques Chirac,
president of France, proposed a European challenge
to Google Print, one that would curb the
“omniglotization” of the word, as another
French official put it, and give students an alter-
native to Googling their way in English through
say, the French Revolution, an example chosen
by the director of France’s national library.

One didn’t need to be president of anything,
of course, in order to dissent from Google’s vi-
sion. A representative online comment referred to
a “Shaftesbury bargain.” Library collections in the
past, this critic argued, “have served as their own
advertisement, but now they will become a ve-
hicle for selling something else.” Much of the
commentary, on the other hand, was quite po-
tive, if a little wonder-struck at the boldness and
scale of Google Print. “I think what Google are
undertaking in this program is truly fantastic!” one
blogger recorded. “To have all that information
available through Google will really bring infor-
mation that would be otherwise unobtainable to
the masses.”

The idea of a universal library is far from a
new one, but the dream always came mixed with
a good dose of sci-fi. More than that, librarians
were supposed to be in charge of the universal li-
brary, weren’t they? Now, from nowhere, there’s a
plausible model resembling the universal library
and who’s running things but a pair of 30-some-
thing grad-school entrepreneurs who set out to
organize all of the world’s information and knew
that recent making a deal with librarians. The aca-
demicians in all its historied and humbled society’s
cbreaker, suddenly is a partner with an organiza-
tion recognized by everyone as a marvel of capital
innovation.

But, the truly remarkable thing is that when
capitalists finally took note of libraries, what
they noticed wasn’t their hi-tech apparatus, but
their books, printed books. And they wanted old
books, the ones in their archives, many of
them still classified in Dewey or in some home-
made pre-LC system, the ones dusted off every
decade or two and borrowed less often than that,
the forgotten books, problematic in every way,
to some librarians their most unloved belong-
ings, almost an embarrassment. If those books
find a suitor like Google, and capture the
world’s imagination—who knows?—one day
perhaps even the Readers’ Guide will make a
comeback.

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**Technology Left Behind: Where Have All the Catalogers Gone?**

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Recent announcements of job
openings at libraries at colleges
and universities across the coun-
try demonstrate a growing trend
in the cataloging field, the creation of metadata-re-
lated positions and an emphasis on metadata
schemas other than MARC. Libraries of all shapes
and sizes are creating new positions with varying
degrees of emphasis on metadata duties.

Wanting to find out a little more about the
duties of a Metadata Librarian and the impetus for
creating a metadata position, I interviewed several
professionals in the field, including librarians at
Princeton University, the University of Tennes-
see, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology,
and the University of Virginia.

The Metadata Librarian position at the
Princeton University Library was created in 2003
as part of an initiative to get more involved in
digital libraries. It was the first position to be filled
in the newly formed Digital Initiatives department
(http://digital.princeton.edu/). Since then a digital
photographer, a Web designer, and a programmer
have all been added to the department. Digital Ini-
tiatives has focused its efforts on rare and antiquar-
ian books and materials in Princeton’s Special
Collections, and recently the department launched
the prototype of Princeton’s digital library.

Hired in March 2003, Clay Redding’s duties as

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The Metadata Librarian position at UT was cre-
atd a little over three years ago to support the ef-
forts of the DLC. The current Metadata Librarian,
Arwen Hunt, manages the Digital Access unit, a
division of Technical Services. The unit is respon-
sible for scanning and digitizing, metadata design,
production for the DLC projects. Hunt

describes her level of involvement in the local digi-
tal projects as “ranging from responsibility for all
metadata and digital production to a more advisory
duty, determining standards and workflow and con-
ducting training.” In addition to working with the
DLC, she also advises other university and com-
munity projects on metadata and digitization issues.

According to JoAnne Deeken, Head of Tech-

cal Services at the UT Libraries, the goal from
the very beginning was to integrate the DLC into
the library as a whole, rather than emphasizing it as
a separate unit. The Digital Access unit works closely
with MARC catalogers, especially when it is neces-
sary to map one metadata standard to another.

Several years ago the Massachusetts Institute
of Technology (MIT) began OpenCourseWare (OCW),
a unique initiative with the ambitious goal of making
all of the course materials from MIT classes available
to students and educators throughout the world. The
project “is a large-scale, Web-based electronic publish-
ing initiative funded jointly by the William and Flora
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<http://www.against-the-grain.com>