

Where next for the back room?

- What does the future hold for librarians in Technical Services?

Introduction and overview

Where next for the back room? Not decline but expansion, for whilst in-house cataloguing will necessarily continue if libraries are to maintain accurate bibliographic metadata necessary for their resources to be easily searchable and accessible, as books and printed serials increasingly go online new opportunities are appearing for cataloguers. Great potential exists for co-operative ventures between libraries and information services departments as they manage, create and maintain high quality metadata for digital resources produced or selected by their institution and act as community information and knowledge managers.

Potential growth areas/new services

Much of the core business of institutions that libraries support are ripe for the involvement of cataloguers/metadata librarians/information managers, call them what you will. In higher education institutions in particular there is great scope for librarians to advise and consult on such issues as choice of metadata schemas, document and web page metadata, information architecture, including the structure and linking within the university website and virtual or managed learning environment (Rydberg-Cox 2003; Joint 2001, p.14).

Areas ripe for exploitation by cataloguers include the selection, description, indexing and categorisation or even the faceted classification of electronic resources such as databases and learning objects/information resources included in the institutional managed/virtual learning environment. There is also a self-evident need to provide a metadata quality assurance service for self-archived institutional publications, including open access institutional repository/e-print repository materials, digitised and born digital research theses, student dissertations and, increasingly, research data. The publication of research data is becoming increasingly important. Green (2009, p. 7) has recently announced the OECD's decision to pursue a MARC-compatible metadata standard for the description and enhanced accessibility, and therefore improved dissemination of research data. Efforts have also been underway for some time to establish a model for data dissemination (*e.g.* <http://sciencecommons.org/>).

The main problem with such self-archiving and institutional publication has been to encourage researchers and others who produce the publications to submit their work for self-archiving. Perhaps the best way to overcome this problem would be to design tools that enable one-click conversion of documents into Open Access Institute standard compliant XML documents suitable for archiving and preservation (McKierman 2004, p.206) with automatically created XML mark-up, and crude, elementary metadata provided by automated text-extraction. The metadata would then be checked and amended and authority control provided by cataloguers to ensure efficient and elegant searching, browsing and retrieval. Input from cataloguers would ensure research materials documents are retrieved as easily and often as possible thereby maximising the research impact of the institution and its members, which under the new citation-based Research Evaluation Framework will become even more important to higher education institutions.

In the United States, the battle for stakeholders' hearts and minds appears to have been finally won, and libraries are leading the way. At MIT, the library have taken over the university publishing business (*Chronicle of Higher Education* 2009), both MIT and Oregon State University (OSU) have made their researchers give copies of their research publications to their libraries to archive (*MIT open access policy...* 2009; *What we did...* 2009) and Boston University have made self-archiving of all its research publications compulsory (*Open access initiative* 2009). The future of scholarly publishing would appear to be librarians' for the taking. The challenge for cataloguers will be to find ways to add value to repository metadata to ensure research in our archives is more easily found, displayed more reliably and higher up in search result lists and more conveniently browsed without delaying its publication.

Libraries also have a wider role to play in institutional information and knowledge management. With the advent of proprietary information/knowledge management products, such as Microsoft's SharePoint/MOSS 2007, libraries have the opportunity to act as community knowledge managers for their organisations, processing, abstracting, indexing, organising, re-packaging and marketing information produced by one department into a form more useful to others, thereby making the library the hub of all the current information resources for the institution. Some information may even be repackaged and sold to other businesses to generate revenue as demonstrated in a commercial information centre context by Oades (2003).

Back to basics

Teaching methods in schools are increasingly producing promising students who are less independent learners and who have weaker information skills than in the past (Armstrong *et al.*, 2000 cited in Secker 2008, [p. 4]). Many students find searching an unfamiliar library catalogue daunting and in some cases confusing. Subject librarians tend to devote their limited teaching time to demonstrating more complicated bibliographic databases. Cataloguers therefore have an ideal opportunity to teach short courses, perhaps at lunchtimes and in the evenings, equipping students with basic information retrieval skills through teaching catalogue, e-book platform and open access institutional/ePrint repository searching. Cataloguers' uniquely detailed knowledge of catalogue and in-house database structure and functionality makes them ideal as teachers in this increasingly necessary role.

The world outside

The vast explosion in the volume of information, and even more so of data, means that cataloguing of all externally sourced electronic resources is not possible. Although libraries must embrace author, publisher and user generated metadata, cataloguers still have important roles as consultants in helping systems specialists create useful automated metadata and authority control and as community metadata managers, working to resolve metadata issues and provide metadata quality assurance. On a national scale, librarians should already be moving to bring their information handling skills to bear as we move towards a "national e-infrastructure" (former Office of Science and Innovation cited in Redfearn 2008).

For those with a marketing mindset and an eye for the main chance, there is a world of possibilities out there and they all use the skills of the cataloguer.

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