



AT A MOMENT OF PROFOUND NATIONAL CRISIS, a late 19th or early 20th century newspaper, which one I am unable to recall precisely, carried the headline “Country in Handcart, Destination Unknown”. Predictions about the future of the information profession as it attempts to grapple with the consequences of the digital revolution are perhaps unwise, but Nicholas et al make a brave, outspoken, iconoclastic and convincing case that we are already bouncing merrily along in the cart, destination unclear.

I hope that this book will turn out to be a seminal contribution to our thinking. I found the text to be an outstanding – if incomplete, and indeed unsatisfactory, in one or two respects – analysis of our predicament. I regrettably felt little sense of optimism in these pages, and, as a confirmed and long-term pessimist where this issue is concerned, have therefore gleefully signed up for the journey.

There has always been a lively, but sadly ignored in practice, strain of dissent in the professional literature, and this tome represents its apotheosis. Some of the characteristic concerns of the awkward squad have always revolved around an honourable intention to change the way the profession thinks, and to introduce unorthodoxy and dissent into a business which has, for most of its time, operated within a comfortable, conservative consensus which nothing has really split assunder. In the late 1960s Cox, at Leeds University’s Brotherton Library, argued the

case for library subject specialists to be housed inside academic departments. In the non-university sector the concept of the tutor librarian was a noble failure in spite of the innovative and imaginative approach of practitioners like Frank Hatt. Does anyone recall the name? In colleges of education, the shocking idea that book collections should actually be spread throughout the institution, rather than grudgingly disbursed and reclaimed ex cathedra by the library, was advocated to no effect by teachers and (some) librarians. Some of the latter even then believed, in prescient moments, that concepts of ownership of resources would actually get in the way of development. Martell’s *The Client-Centered Library* was written in the eighth decade of the last century. Substitute the word “Consumer” for “Client”. In 2005 the same writer used the phrase “ubiquitous user” to examine traditional output measures in the context of the “search for a new paradigm”, radical change and virtual libraries not constrained by time or space. In the late ‘80s and early ‘90s Sidgreaves and Priestley at Plymouth took on board the basic principle that the library space belonged to the user, and Cox’s view was reaffirmed in the expression that “the academics regard us as their staff”. Others at the same time referred to the certainty that librarians would lose their unique and pre-eminent role as gatekeepers, as “[individuals acquired] the power to control access to information.” The largely fudged convergence movement represented another lost opportunity. Over a period of almost thirty years, this reviewer has argued for new models and new ways of thinking, on the basis that even before digitisation our organisations were out of touch with modern preoccupations and trends, and that we were congenitally incapable of learning from other sectors. In the 1990s the e-Lib project was designed to acquaint us all with the issues and implications of digitisation. Mavericks whose imagination ran away from them attempted to draw examples of the proper way to organise affairs from what archaeologists told them about how the Great Pyramids were built, the activities of the East India Company, the business mores of Italian City States, the lifestyles of freebooting 18th Century Pirates, the project management skills of civil engineers and environmentalists, the team building skills of round-the-world yachtsmen, and the value and relevance of David Beckham’s brand creation to library marketing. Others, closer to the concerns of this book, railed against our over-concern with technology at the cost of considering the nature of the organisations we will need to build in order to cope with a digital revolution. At the centre of this revolution was a change in the nature of the user, based on a heightened awareness of their power as consumers.

What I am suggesting is first that these old arguments from the analogue world emphasise the enormity of the task facing us in the digital world. So far, little has changed. Second, they underscore the view that we have no real tradition of learning from other people, or making significant changes in our ways of organising and our habits of thinking. While there is nothing new in all this, the book represents a leap forward. It makes connections in a vivid way, and attacks a number of shibboleths while bringing to bear a brutal clarity. Earlier skirmishes around this issue all ended with very little except some extraneous noise and light entertainment. This is really where this book begins, with Nicholas, Rowlands, Withey and

Profession in Handcart Destination Unknown

Reviews

edited by Lyndon Pugh

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Dobrowolski's introduction: "the core information professions – librarianship, archives and records management, publishing and journalism – have been rocked, and, in some instances, derailed, by the digital transition [for this] the main reason is, probably, that information professionals are insular and tribal (something particularly true of librarians) and what happens outside their strictly defined discipline boundaries are not their prime concern, even though the user and internet are busy blowing up and redrawing those boundaries."

The introduction also contains a key summation of the power shift: with the role of the gatekeeper now redundant or even downright obstructive, information consumers, for this is what we must call them now, are going their own way, outside our control. We know next to nothing about their real information-gathering habits, and what we do know amounts to little of real value.

The burden of the book is to assess the nature of this change (I am not sure I would agree that it is technically a step-change, for a reason which I will come to later) and describe some of the most important information-seeking characteristics in other sectors. It is to make the argument for a change in our belief systems, to identify new consumer expectations, and to call for new models. Nicholas ends the text with some standard change management remedies: cope with constant change; shift the perspective on the value of information away from the principle of access – which as he rightly says is not an outcome in itself – to the actual benefits or outcomes delivered by the investment in information; keep things simple; concentrate on what is known to work (a more complex and taller order than it might appear); cooperation – but with outfits like Google, Yahoo, Amazon and the like; and maybe holding on to the physical space, a point on which the team which produced this book are not clear.

In between, in chapter 2, Richard Withey looks at the nature of the digital marketplace, and in particular emphasises its role in destroying the exclusivity of traditional information services. Sadly for both of us, his description of "a fresh-faced library school student . . . required to study the workings of the book publishing industry, even to the extent of setting up and printing pages from a hand-press, and learning the meaning of terms such as verso, flyleaf, copyright and perfect binding" rings a bell. This chapter, well-argued, makes comparisons with change in the media and in publishing, and includes the impact of social networking. It identifies key shifts in both telecommunications and computing. On the back of all this, the idea of the digital native develops. This is the emergence of the consumer as the controller of the agenda, with very different expectations from the conventional information-seeker, not only exercising economic power but also taking part in the process of content creation.

Russell, in chapter 3, considers the e-shopper. The ways in which the e-shopper exerts an influence which will extend into other activities and sectors, including the provision of scholarly information, are vital.

The value of studying this group lies in what we can learn, if we wish to, from their use of the internet. A swathe of this contribution is made up of stating the obvious, but its consideration of the behaviour of e-shoppers still has a value to us. It concludes with the assertion that what e-shoppers expect from a commercial site will become the norm as far as sites providing information are concerned. They will demand that finding information will be as easy as buying products, and will wish to rely on a standard approach and a standard technique across all the sectors they use.

Moss's chapter on the library in the digital age (chapter 4) was, on the face of it, potentially one of the most interesting and useful in the book. Nevertheless, it was, to me, a somewhat disappointing contribution. Parts of it could easily be read as a classic example of academics writing for academics. In other places, the obvious was again stated with a stylistically-expansive flourish. Where the writer stood in this debate was not always automatically clear to me, but his insistence on the lack of wisdom reflected in the "introspective hyperbole" which surrounds the issue of digitisation, and the timely reminder that there have been other information revolutions throughout history, were very good interventions. His strictures on the technologically-driven emphasis on access and service may well strike home in some quarters, and some of his comments hinted tantalisingly at a more promising debate which never really seemed to materialise. His reference to

an "ontology of digital content that itself predicated a convergence in professional practice among archivists, librarians and museum curators" is an example of this, while his comments on blogging and the role of the public archive are significant. To conclude, his reassertion of the crucial nature of the sanctity of the archival record, and the digital threat to it, should be compulsory reading.

The following chapter, Gunter's, on the psychology of the digital consumer, one of two contributed by this writer, offers a clear view of the way the internet has changed lives. There are useful indicators of common problems in areas which should be increasingly relevant to information services, such as distributed organisations and virtual teams: there are lessons to be applied to virtual reference services and also to videoconferencing.

More generally, Gunter's exploration of the "rules of online interpersonal and human-computer interaction" to improve understanding of the process and to utilise effectively online communication systems, is relevant, as are his views on how computer-mediated communication operates in an environment without physical or non-verbal cues. Given the massive expansion of internet use, and the growing use of virtual meetings, virtual teams, distributed organisations and online reference services referred to above, as well as the widespread use of email, how social conventions are used in the digital environment becomes a critical issue.

Closely argued and clearly presented, the paper contains some valuable insights which are widely applicable to digital information services. Crucially, the internet penetration categorised by Gunter represents both a severe challenge and a major opportunity for information services. It duplicates, and in many ways competes with, but also enhances, the conventional delivery of information services. Understanding the social dimension in which digital exchanges occur can provide valuable insights into how this phenomenon can be dealt with:



it is essential that we understand how people engage, psychologically, with these technologies. ... It is also important that online service providers are aware of difficulties digital consumers experience when interacting with online systems and services.

Gunter also considers the problem of the non-use of online services, stressing that why people remain offline is as important as how they behave when online.

Much of Gunter's argument revolves around the related ideas of media richness and mediated communication. Most of the forms of communication he is concerned with, and which we, as working information professionals committed to multimedia, deal in, fall depressingly short of the richest form of communication provided by face-to-face exchanges. They lack the range of cues available to participants in a verbal exchange, and the paper moves on to consider how the conventions of face-to-face communication can be imported and then usefully adapted for use in computer-mediated communication. This is particularly obvious in the case of text-based communication, lacking as it does the non-verbal cues, inhibiting the expression of personal identity, and forcing a degree of anonymity on the participants. A brief consideration of the way in which different individuals use email, ranging from a cursory, stripped-down and almost dehumanised style, often without even a salutation, at one end of the scale, to the user who uses a broad range of conventions more akin to letter-writing at the other, will underline this point. The brusque military style of some emails will lead to a particular assessment of the character of the sender. It will create a barrier to achieving a better



understanding. It will contrast with a more open, natural and discursive style which will give more clues as to the personality of the sender, and open up the possibility of a broader and more refined mutual understanding. This is labelled the "impression formation process":

... skilled use of subtle linguistic and non-linguistic (symbolic) devices in this environment can enhance communication effectiveness even though we can neither see nor hear the people we are interacting with. [It is possible to] overcome the limitations of online text-based

communication by seeking out information about those whom we cannot see or hear online in order to create as positive an impression of them as we can.

Gunter argues, from the literature, that the expert use of such approaches can create relationships which will be "every bit as close as ones developed through face-to-face interactions."

The objective is to develop a "social presence" which will form the basis of rich communication. This is communication which is unambiguous, offers feedback, creates immediacy, can convey emotion and is more personalised.

The key passages of Gunter's paper deal with the shortcomings of the text format in digital communication. Where this is predominant, any sense of identity is lost. The answer is found in the use of the standard norms of social conduct. Here Gunter reports on a number of interesting experiments. These include the use of various devices such as text-boxes, icons and animated figures – that is, the way people and their ideas are presented onscreen – to change perceptions of the other parties involved in the communication. Obvious tactics such as providing biographies and pictures of participants are also put forward as ways of assisting the creation of a more accurate picture of the other people taking part in the communication process.

Perhaps of equal significance, Gunter refers to a body of work which indicates how decision making in virtual meetings or virtual teams can also be influenced by the use of social processes taken from conventional communication. This appears





to assert that the possibility exists of a stronger tendency to conform, under certain conditions, leading to group think. The phenomenon can emerge where participants are represented onscreen in ways which subtly emphasise the “sameness of others, reinforcing the sense that they were a group.”

This tendency to conform was also seen when there was interaction between humans and machines, where computer agents were shown on screen as text boxes.

The research findings analysed by Gunter confirm that the “psychological principles from the offline world also apply in the on-line world.” This might at least prompt some of us to reconsider our email styles. It might also lead to some more interesting communication patterns. The need to understand better, and use properly, online and computer-mediated communication is established. Unless we take heed of this we diminish the richness of communication, and with it lose valuable information which would otherwise help us to arrive at sounder judgements of the people we deal with in the virtual world, and their ideas.

Nicholas et al follow with what the editors call a lynchpin chapter, in which the “information-seeking behaviour of the digital information consumer” is analysed, and a profile is offered.

An impressive piece of long-term research by the CIBER research group forms the basis of this: “Information-seeking portraits” for a wide range of scholarly communities, including staff, students and researchers, are provided. This chapter is another which should be compulsory reading. Detailed and clearly written, the library implications are set out, and one of the most worrying con-

clusions is that the scale and rapidity of the observed change is new. It does not so much represent a “new form of behaviour, but a much more virulent strain of that behaviour.” In this context, the authors affirm that the technologically-based rather than user-centric response of libraries is not helpful.

Williams, Rowlands and Fieldhouse carry out a similar investigation into the digital information-seeking behaviour of young people – the “Google Generation”. This is also instructive, and is brimming with lessons for information services. It also offers some practical suggestions for improved information literacy programmes at school level, on a collaborative basis, involving schools, libraries and parents.

The chapter also serves to debunk many of the myths surrounding our hazy view of the information-seeking behaviour of young people. Gunter then weighs in again with chapter 8 on digital information consumption and the future. Competition, new business models, choice and changing roles are dealt with before David Nicholas rounds off the debate with his final contribution, referred to at the beginning of this article.

There are two obstacles to be surmounted in all of this – three if we count the fact that it is currently impossible to provide hard and fast practical answers to so many of the problems set out clearly and trenchantly in this volume.

The first one is that the word “consumers” will undoubtedly cause some trouble. It is time that the profession simply got over this. This is the sort of stark language that we need to use if the unavoidable need for radical change is to be hammered home.

The second problem is even less tractable.

Dealing with the changes so admirably explored here is a complex matter. The complexity comes partly from the facts on the ground, where our users sometimes show no real sign of being willing and able to let analogue information go, and from the recognition that we do not yet know how to respond to the challenge of digitisation. It is no accident that this book is a little short on concrete actions.

Hybridity is still a requirement imposed on information services by their users. The evidence is that analogue information cannot yet be disposed of, and that we are not, at this stage, in an “either-or” situation. We will need both for some time to come, and one of the essential dilemmas of change management, that is managing the status quo while developing the instruments of change, will have to be grappled with. There are still information services whose budgets reflect an equal split between digital and analogue resources, although this ignores the massive access to electronic information bought by the same money. The evidence of my eyes in libraries I use indicates that the body of users is not yet ready to see itself primarily as a consumer of digital information, let alone as a digital consumer to the exclusion of everything else.

It may well be that the thinking reflected in this book, which attentive readers might conclude I agree with, is ahead not only of some of the profession, but also of the consumers themselves.

At this time that is not a bad position in which to be, and one which we should welcome. The authors have made the case irresistibly. It is for practitioners to respond.

Lyndon Pugh



**Godwin, J., and Parker, J. (eds).
Information Literacy Meets Library 2.0.
Facet, 2008. isbn 9781856046374**

HA VE LIBRARIES KEPT up-to-date with Web 2.0 technologies? Information Literacy Meets Library 2.0 will eliminate any doubts about information professionals' serious intent to remain at the forefront of implementations in this field. To practise what it preaches, the text is also continually updated on a blog. Make it top of your reading list if you are still hesitating over whether RSS feeds, Flickr or a Wikipedia entry will be appropriate for your institution or might upset senior managers.

This volume comprises a collection of contributions which describe the experiences of academic and public libraries in the UK, US and Australia in applying Web 2.0 technologies with positive and exciting results.

For those who are not conversant with the full scale of Web 2.0 terminology, and might have only heard or read the words without ever being quite sure what they stand for, Peter Godwin provides an excellent introduction to all the concepts necessary to appreciate the contributions which follow. He creates an overview of the expectations of the "digital natives" – which academic and public libraries face daily – and sets out

the future shifting Web landscape.

The essence of Web 2.0 is that it will allow "individuals to interact, create and share information using the web as a platform". Thus information flows in multiple directions and we must accommodate this. This new "read/write web" is affecting all sectors, and we are no longer able to prevent our users from consulting Google in preference to our fine-tuned skills, and must start teaching them instead how Wikipedia is constructed and what its limitations are.

How can they be persuaded that the resources we have paid thousands for are superior to their "berry picking methods" of information gathering, if we do not understand what they are talking about? How can we be certain that we are not missing other relevant means of communicating with those whom we wish to educate?

The contributors to this book are early adopters and trend setters from which others can, and should, learn. Peter Godwin argues that, in spite of the sustainability risks:

the web as a platform and open source software, which is not dependent on support from IT departments. . . can set librarians free to experiment and test their good ideas.

The second chapter takes the novice through a full account of the terms, concepts, ideas and ethos of Web 2.0. It is all here, clearly laid out, with examples and explanations: blogs, wikis, syndicated content, podcasts, videocasts, mash-ups, social sharing, social networks, folksonomies and virtual worlds. For information professionals who are familiar with all this, the journey can start with the contributions in the following chapters, which detail the experiences of professionals from three continents.

Part two of the book discusses the implications of Library 2.0 for information literacy, and investigates approaches to teaching LIS students. The set of useful skills will depend on the context, but what is crucial is that it needs to help the parent organisation manage its resources more effectively. This poses challenges for LIS curriculum content and delivery methods.

For example, school librarians can use RSS for professional learning programmes, as well as for news and information. Many public libraries in the US offer virtual services using blogs to communicate with their users, in a two-way process; some use RSS feeds for events, classes and for putting out catalogue news. One advantage of RSS as an information delivery mechanism is that it requires little effort on both sides. Other libraries provide subject guides in the form of wikis, and podcasts on how to use the library service. Instant Messaging is being adopted increasingly as a reference channel by libraries which already inhabit MySpace, Facebook and YouTube.

Part 3 deals with Library 2.0 and information literacy in practice. It reports the experience of students at the University of Northampton in exposure to blog-based information skills teaching units created by library staff, whilst at Oregon State University freshers are being taught the basis of the information literacy through developing an understanding of the process of creating a Wikipedia articles. Meanwhile, at the London School of Economics, RSS is being used to enhance access to information





on training courses, including information literacy classes.

Podcasting allows the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan to provide “detailed instruction in a preferred portable format”. The podcasts can be listened to as many times as necessary, and links, images and videos can be integrated. Moreover, basic library orientation podcasts can be customised for specific user groups.

The chapter on PennTags describes a

social bookmarking tool aimed at locating, organising and sharing online resources developed by librarians at the University of Pennsylvania. This includes not only data from library systems and the public web, but also puts user-created content into the library catalogue, thus helping students, faculty and staff share and manage their research.

Using Flickr can be fun, but it can also be a way of encouraging students to learn information literacy through the assessment of anonymous tagging contributions by other users. It can create an insight into user perspectives – reviving the arguments over what is “accurate” and what is “meaningful”, and reflecting the tension between natural language searching and controlled vocabularies.

What librarians seem to have learned from these experiences is that to become successful Web 2.0 technology users they must first become Web 2.0 consumers. Through trying to find ways of teaching information literacy to “digital natives”,

librarians have learned Web 2.0 literacy themselves. The Open University now offers a course which teaches the basics of Web 2.0 tools.

And what about the future? The same Open University course reflects the uncertainty surrounding how the technology will develop, and what the “next big thing” will be. Computer and video games and simulations are becoming central to training and teaching, and can be used successfully to develop a new generation’s information literacy skills.

This book encourages us to follow Bradley’s advice to forget the label and aspire to improve. For those who fear the Web 2.0 ethos, where every opinion is as valid as the next, and information expertise is eroded by digital “Maoism”, this book provides plentiful evidence that survival is about adaptation and integration.

Lina Coelho, Sub-Librarian, BMA

★★★★

A Labour of Love for All Involved

Kevin Curran, University of Ulster School of Computing and Intelligent Systems, reviews: Webb, J.,

Gannon-Leary, P., and Bent, M. (eds). *Providing Effective Library Services for Research*. Facet, 2007. 101856045897

THE INFORMATION NEEDS of researchers, and the various ways in which the quality of information provision can be enhanced for this group of users, are currently a focus of attention globally, and are major priorities for higher education.

Researchers rely on libraries to provide the information they need; of equal importance, supporting research is a fundamental reason for the existence of academic libraries. This book explores the crucial relationship between libraries and researchers, and focuses on developing and managing effective library services to support research. It makes use of the authentic voices of researchers, drawn from a survey conducted by the authors.

The text considers the issues in a wider strategic context: who researchers are, their information-seeking behaviour, the resources required to support research, and the current LIS response. This book covers key topics such as supporting researchers, current challenges for libraries; defining both research and researchers. It also identifies the essential principles on which proper research support depends, among other important topics. The writers set out to advise all who work with researchers in libraries, and do so by combining practical advice with a useful exploration of fundamental issues relating to the relationship between research

and libraries. It is relevant for all who work in academic and research libraries.

Written for practitioners, the work reflects the perspective of practitioner-researchers, and the topic is covered in nine chapters.

Chapter 1 is a gentle introduction to supporting research and researchers. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the current challenges for libraries and research support. Chapter 3 is about research and researchers, with particular emphasis on the PhD process, and chapter 4 is concerned with collection management.

Chapter 5 deals with the researcher’s toolkit and the influences on resource use. Chapter 6 provides an excellent overview of services to facilitate research, and this feeds nicely into the information-literature researcher issue. Chapter 8 discusses the key challenges for the future, and finally chapter 9 discusses the major principles for supporting research including the relevant law, values and principles.

Providing Effective Library Services for Researchers outlines, in a logical manner, a process for improving the practitioner’s research methods. It also provides a glimpse into the future of research in universities.

The bibliography is exhaustive and really does give the game away – this book was undoubtedly compiled by librarians.

The publication is a collaboration between

three university librarians, and states its aim early on: to provide a practical introduction for newly qualified and practising liaison and research support librarians.

One particular passage at the start of the final chapter makes a good argument for spend money on a book such as this:

Every piece of research that I do or assess needs a solid base of a review of the literature to make it good research.

The best repository of that kind of info is the library....You can use Google and you might find something but that’s not good enough for academic research

In fact, I enjoyed all the quotations which are liberally scattered throughout this book. One was left with the impression at the end – that this simply was a labour of love for all involved. ★★★★★

Key Topics Include:

Supporting Research

Collection Management

Key Challenges

Researcher’s Toolkit