

---

Volume 13  
Number 1  
*New Voices/New Views: The Next Wave of Librarians (Spring 2007)*

---

July 2014

## Cataloging Today: Thinking Globally, Acting Locally

April Younglove  
*Linfield College*

### Recommended Citation

Younglove, A. (2014). Cataloging Today: Thinking Globally, Acting Locally. *OLA Quarterly*, 13(1), 16-21.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1147>

© 2014 by the author(s).

*OLA Quarterly* is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374

# Cataloging Today:

## Thinking Globally, Acting Locally

---

**by April Younglove**  
Student in Emporia State  
University's Oregon SLIM Program

Technical Services Specialist  
Linfield College

MLS Candidate (expected  
graduation date 2008), School  
of Library and Information  
Management, Emporia State  
University

Cataloging has ceased to be a local process involving individual catalogers who create and maintain a limited collection of paper cards. It is now a global interaction between those who produce and exchange digital MARC records. The responsibility for the creation and maintenance of a modern Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC) is no longer the sole domain of librarians. IT personnel and even software vendors have a hand in how patrons search through and view the data that make up a computer catalog.

While modern electronic records allow librarians to quickly change or add records to the catalog, digital records lack the local and personal touch of old fashioned catalog cards. In a conversation, Clackamas County's network cataloger Judy Roberts shared with me that in the past library staff could add helpful handwritten notes to card records like "good for Mrs. Hall's 3rd grade class on volcanoes." These notes have been eliminated by catalog automation. In Oregon, where libraries are increasingly banding together and sharing OPACs, managing the content of electronic catalogs so that they turn up cohesive search results while still reflecting local interests is difficult. Reintroducing locally collected wisdom into catalogs that are becoming networked over wider and wider areas will require Oregon librarians to come up with creative and thoughtful new approaches to catalog design and implementation.

In the mid sixties, cataloging utilities like the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) emerged and began facilitating the exchange of MARC records on a mass scale. Catalogers everywhere radically changed the nature of their profession by surrendering their absolute in-house authority over catalog records and accepting work from fellow



Reintroducing local collected wisdom into catalogs that are becoming networked over wider and wider areas will require Oregon librarians to come up with creative and thoughtful new approaches to catalog design and implementation.

librarians around the world. Because copy cataloging with OCLC reduces duplication of efforts by enabling libraries to download electronic records that have already been created by other institutions, most catalogs have become a mishmash of records from many sources instead of a cohesive data set created and controlled by a single indexer. As several Oregon librarians have explained to me, most catalogers would rather wait for an item record to appear in OCLC than create an original record and get the item onto the shelf more quickly. Letting items age until they gain OCLC records is often the only practical solution for a cataloger faced with the decision of either spending a half hour cataloging a single item or using that same time to slightly modify and then upload 20 existing records. As a result, libraries are using fewer and fewer records created in-house. Trends away from local control and towards sharing catalog records mean that librarians must be especially aware of how records are shared, stored and displayed so that they can maintain high



quality catalogs that serve the interests of their communities.

One of the consequences of copying records from many different sources is that the records all differ somewhat depending on where they came from. That is, if a single cataloger were entering all the data into a catalog's MARC records, he or she would probably consistently fill in the same fields. However, since records are now being created by many different people, they are all being filled out slightly differently. There are core data fields that must be present in every MARC record, but beyond these few key fields, how much and what information on each record is up to whoever created it. The disadvantage of this is that searchers can no longer familiarize themselves with a catalog's particular style and must guess which types of search information may or may not be contained in a library's records.

Internet record sharing has brought about such a dramatic increase in fast and easy copy cataloging that since the mid-90s libraries have been replacing cataloging professionals with less trained paraprofessionals, if they replace them at all (Rider, 1996). This tends to shift the burden of record creation and maintenance onto libraries that do retain qualified catalogers. In the end, it could also reduce the amount of quality records available online and will place even more cataloging authority in the hands of even fewer individuals. Local catalog control may further erode as these OCLC contributors are not all in the same country, let alone the same county. Libraries short on staff and money can even outsource cataloging duties by using services like OCLC's PromptCat, which allows vendors to send out pre-selected MARC records with book orders. While there have always been

records supplied through vendors—even in card catalog days libraries were able to order pre-printed catalog cards from the Library of Congress—such records were of a guaranteed quality and were understood to supplement rather than replace cataloging efforts (Mouw, 2005).

Fortunately, there are a number of librarians, both nationally and here in Oregon, who endeavor to retain high quality cataloging and who aim to restore local control to standardized electronic records and interfaces. Most of the librarians that I interviewed in Oregon still retain a measure of control over their catalog by adapting OCLC records slightly. They typically do so to aid specialized groups of users or to conform to local library expectations. For instance, Sara Nolan, Cataloging Librarian and Systems Coordinator for Clackamas Community College, adds the subject heading "High interest-low vocabulary books" for items that might interest ESL students, while Multnomah County supplements records with non-Roman characters like Chinese or Russian whenever possible.

A big change for library catalogs in Oregon over the past decade or so has been



April Younglove



the increase of shared online catalog groups. Libraries in Northwest Oregon have been especially adept at utilizing Wide Area Networks and shared software to consolidate county holdings, form powerful regional partnerships, and share collections. Even though alliances bring about exciting new opportunities for sharing materials between libraries, OPACs can be very complicated and can make once simple cataloging decisions complex. Response time to local issues may be slowed as decisions must often be agreed upon by a larger number of people.

Since Multnomah County's transition from being a cooperative to being a unified county system, branch libraries wishing to make procedural or labeling changes have had to band together and get up a quorum of librarians to make their case to the county. Meanwhile, according to Library and Network Service Supervisor for the Clackamas County Cooperative, Jeff Ring, different branches present their requests to Clackamas' county office and then the county either makes the modification if it only affects that branch, or has other member libraries vote on the proposed change. As systems become networked in larger and larger groups, maintaining good communication between branches becomes more challenging. The professionals most qualified to understand a problem may not necessarily be working on site anymore to notice it. In Multnomah County, technical staff must occasionally shadow reference librarians at various branches so that they can monitor their impact on actual services.

On a patron level, local OPAC users experience problems with shared catalogs when they get search results from all over the county or state but only want books in their immediate library—especially if how to sort search results by location is not im-

mediately obvious. Additionally, if several different libraries contribute similar records to the shared catalog, then the patron may be overwhelmed and confused by a list of 30 different item records that all seem to be the same. This lack of standardization can make records more difficult to sort through and can cause quality control issues. The Orbis-Cascade alliance group created a Duplicate Records Reduction Group that identifies similar records for merging, but not all cooperative cataloging groups have procedures to deal with this issue (Nathanson and Hackleman, 2006).

In Northwest Oregon, regional catalog consolidation has been driven, in part, by the amorphous character of the Portland metropolitan area. Library users, who rarely understand the complex municipal relationships between different libraries, have come to expect the simplicity and reliability of branch standardization. Jeff Ring explains that patrons who identify three or four different libraries as “home” libraries have promoted centralization efforts and catalog sharing. In 1999, Oregon librarians on the



Although Library 2.0 features will not eliminate all of the issues with modern electronic records and how they are shared in Oregon libraries, they will help to reintroduce lost local control ...



Vision 2010 Task Force introduced the goal of creating a statewide shared cataloging network (Horan, 2004). Although OLA has decided in retrospect that a statewide catalog and statewide library cards are perhaps not as important as other goals at present, there is still a desire to foster regional unity by helping libraries throughout Oregon achieve similar levels of technical sophistication and increasing shared statewide lending privileges (Vision 2010 Committee, 2001).

Ironically, although participating in local networks sometimes reduces local control, one of its benefits is that greater pooled resources allow individual libraries to invest in the electronic features that help offset this loss. As OPAC interfaces become increasingly sophisticated, there are more options for staff, and even library users, to tailor their catalogs to their population. In the summer of 2005, Multnomah County's new user-friendly OPAC combined services from the vendor Syndetics with the customizable Innovative Interfaces. It now provides users with book reviews and in-catalog item pictures. One of its newest features even allows patrons to supply books with ratings. In the future, Multnomah catalogers suggest that patrons might even be able to contribute their own reviews.


When considering the possibilities of improving Washington County's OPAC with Web enhancements Sherwood's cataloger, Mary Madland, wisely points out that while, "some internet savvy patrons would love it, others still have trouble placing holds." Additionally, many of these interactive features, popularly dubbed Library 2.0, take power away from cataloging librarians and give it to users, an idea that makes those who worry about maintaining the quality of data in the catalog uncomfort-

able. However, Oregonians who are ready for a more interactive library catalog have recently begun requesting upgrades. Jeff Ring thinks that Library 2.0 contains many interesting new ideas that could help reconnect Oregon catalogs with this patron base. Ring is excited about Clackamas County's move from Dynix to Horizon because Horizon could support some of the features that the public wants. Library patrons could use RSS feeds to receive automatic notification when new books by their favorite authors are added to the catalog. Horizon could also potentially recall past searches and include library reviews from regulars. As an example of what an OPAC can aspire to be, Ring points out the Web site for the Ann Arbor Public Library in Michigan: <http://www.aadl.org/>.

According to Ann Arbor's Web site, its 2005 catalog remodel "has been selected by the American Library Association as the best library Web site in the nation for libraries with budgets of \$6,000,000." In addition to patron RSS feeds and reviews by patrons and professionals, its site includes library blog entries that allow user feedback. Ann Arbor's catalog also offers unique options such as an online image database that invites local residents to contribute historical images of the town, and its interface allows people to see a visual representation of the catalog with a tag cloud. It is even experimentally allowing users to make "notes" on the virtual images of catalog cards—just as reference staff could make notations on real cards in the past.

Although Library 2.0 features will not eliminate all of the issues with modern electronic records and how they are shared in Oregon libraries, they will help to reintroduce lost local control without requiring



participants to abandon copy cataloging and shared catalogs. Libraries and catalogs in Oregon will inevitably become more networked, which is a boon to residents who desire increased borrowing privileges, and the time saving benefits of copy cataloging are too enormous to give up. Therefore, it is up to individual librarians in Oregon to ensure that local catalog records do not decrease in quality and that their patrons have access to a catalog that reflects the interests of their community. 

## References

- Horan, P. (2004). Statewide Catalog: 2004 planning report. *Oregon Library Association Quarterly*. 9(4)/10(1): 6–7. Retrieved Online from <http://www.olaweb.org/quarterly/quar9-4/ola-spring2004-guts.pdf> on December 6, 2006.
- Mouw, J.R. (2005). Library use of vendor-supplied catalog copy. *Library Collections, Acquisitions & Technical Services* 29:235–237
- Nathanson, N. & Hackleman, D. (2006). Summit Unmasked. Regional Meetings to demystify Summit and the relationship between the local and central databases. December 5, 2006. Reed College, Portland Oregon.

Rider, M. (1996). Developing New Roles for Paraprofessionals in Cataloging. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 22: 26–32

Vision 2010 Committee (2001). A Call to Action for the Oregon Library Association. *Oregon Library Association Quarterly*. 7(3): no page. Retrieved Online from <http://www.olaweb.org/quarterly/quar7-3/vi-comm.shtml> on December 6, 2006.

