OLAQ

July 2014

Technical services and the internet: An Oregon perspective

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Technological change continues to confront librarians in many ways. This change is affecting how they feel about their jobs and how they complete their work. (Mellendorf, 1995)

The latest of these changes is the Internet, but as recently as 1994, Gillian McCombs wrote "the Internet remains largely unexplored from a technical services perspective." I recently talked with technical services librarians around Oregon about how the Internet has changed their professional lives. Some libraries are still working at establishing a direct Internet connection, while others have only gained access recently. For an increasing number such as Carol Drost, associate university librarian for technical services at Willamette University, the "Internet has become an immediate, everyday problem solving tool."

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Certainly the major effect of the Internet on technical services librarians has been the increased communication with colleagues via listservs, e-mail, and newsgroups. In her summary of the responses to an autocat listserv survey, *Internet's Value to Catalogers,* Chris Long wrote, "Respondents were most fervent in expressing how essential communicating with other catalogers has become in the performance of their jobs." These new sources of professional dialogue "provide the benefit of rapid communication with large numbers of cataloging colleagues", notes Lisa Haley at Southern Oregon State College. She says that she benefits from work others have done in researching a particular problem and from dialogues about problems or issues that allow "catalogers to collaborate in working out solutions." At OSU, Richard Brumley, head of acquisitions, conducts all his correspondence via e-mail. "It doesn't matter where you send a message; it could be across the library or to Boston," he notes. He too subscribes to several listservs, including ACQNET and PRICES, the newsletter on serials prices. In addition, OSU does most of its serials claiming through e-mail and places most of its new book orders over the Internet. Lori Robare, cataloger at the University of Oregon, concurs when she writes of how e-mail communication has changed the scope of her network of colleagues: "I now feel that I know catalogers all around the country," she says.

Technical services librarians also employ other libraries' on-line catalogs in a variety of ways. In acquisitions, they can help in the location of bibliographic information for foreign or out-of-print publications. Catalogers judiciously search on-line catalogs to aid in cataloging especially difficult pieces. Often copy is enriched for local catalogs with notes and additional subject headings that aren't retained in the OCLC database. Drost occasionally searches other catalogs for copy when she doesn't find any on OCLC as she did recently for a book published in Canada. She will often search for information like subject headings on pieces being added to their Children's Literature collection since she is less familiar with cataloging for that material. Robare says, "I frequently search large databases like Melvyl to find ideas for subject headings or classification possibilities for works similar to those I'm cataloging," or for help in deciding how to handle a "sticky series" problem. Although it may take some time to search, the additional information it provides her often saves time in decision making. And for the new cataloger, Haley finds it "useful to be able to access the OPACs of other libraries to see how they handled specific cataloging situations."

Probably the third greatest impact on technical services is the availability of documentation and other electronic Web resources such as publishers' catalogs. Vianne Tang Sha's Library and Information Science Toolbox, distributed at OLA's Technical Services Roundtable Preconference this year, lists numerous sites. I recently used one of the sites listed to locate a distributor of Southeast Asian materials. On another occasion, we used the United States Book Exchange to identify available titles. Drost finds that she pursues problems further because Library of Congress documents are available on the Web. Robare uses the Web sometimes for authority work for personal and corporate names by checking a Web site for an author's academic affiliation. Most of her communication with OCLC is now done on the Web, reporting duplicates, filling out change requests, registering for workshops, and reading their publications. Other Web documents are not as easy to use or locate. Judy Chien, Acquisition Manager at Willamette University, feels that the Internet's potential is great but that "finding things on the Web can still be time consuming and you can get distracted along the way." Robare hopes that better search engines will improve access to documentation such as OCLC's Bibliographic Formats and Standards, for which you currently have to click through screen after screen after screen to locate the sought-for information.

In small-to-medium public libraries, the Internet may have an even greater impact on Technical Services librarians than in the academics. At the Douglas County Library, the head of technical services has the primary responsibility for the library's Internet connection. Carol McGeehon, Douglas County Library's senior librarian for technical services, is in the midst of testing a new direct Internet line that replaces dial-in access. Up to now, the technical services librarians and staff have made limited use of the Internet with dial-up access. McGeehon foresees a gradual growth in their utilization of its many resources beginning with participation in specific listservs.

At the University of Oregon, technical services librarians have been encouraged to participate in teaching the library's Internet curriculum. Robare teaches several workshops each term. While she says she enjoys this immensely, it's also stressful because she has to keep well-informed about Web developments and

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increasing computerization, learning at least the basics of PC or Macintosh technical support seems inevitable.

Another area of technical support is all the new software one must learn to use and create for the Internet. Though HTML (hypertext markup language) is a fairly easy language to learn, using it well and working with graphics involves a lot of practice.

Collection Development

I think this is probably the area where we are likely to see the most changes in science librarianship. One of the most important areas I envision is the growth of materials in on-line form. We are starting to see the proliferation of electronic journals in two forms, both original journals that exist only in electronic form, as well as paper journals that are duplicated in electronic form. We are also starting to see the availability through the World Wide Web of many of the major on-line databases (eg *Medline, Psychinfo,* etc.). Before, such databases tended only to be available from sources such as Dialog. In the future, I expect most of these databases will be available to any user on the Web—for a price, of course! How the library provides access to these databases and journals is going to be interesting. Especially as the development of ways to pay for information provided over the Internet matures. Will the library or university have to provide each user with a credit card number for Internet browsing, or will we continue to provide our information only through the library by purchasing site licenses to all the sites we deem important enough for students and faculty to need? Will the Library run one account that pays for all student and faculty usage? And how will we monitor which sites are of an academic nature suitable for the library to subsidize? If we think journal infla-

tion makes our budgets unpredictable, wait until we have to deal with a scenario like this! And, of course, many other scenarios could emerge.

The duties of the subject specialist also have a potential to expand with the Internet. Is a subject specialist responsible for collecting or providing access to Internet sites in his or her collection discipline? For instance, should the biology subject specialist attempt to create a page linking all sites of importance to biology? My own experience has shown that doing this well is incredibly time consuming, and quickly becomes unmanageable. The number of sites is increasing too quickly, and the task of evaluating them for quality is too time consuming. At present my strategy is to provide links only to certain categories of sites. Presently this includes subject-oriented guides (let others do the cataloging), e-journals, local sites, and professional associations. I suspect that e-journals will be the next category to become too unwieldy to include on my subject oriented pages. Creating a new home page can be a lot of fun, maintaining it and keeping it current is the hard part!

I have only scratched the surface regarding how the Internet has affected my job as a science reference librarian and how I envision my job changing. We are still in the early years of the information revolution that the personal computer and the Internet have created. Yet the changes of the last few years and their implications for the future are immense, and so will be the challenges! Lets face it, these are the kinds of challenges that make our jobs fun! **Q**

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spends a lot of time preparing for classes, which is time away from her primary responsibilities. But like other technical services librarians I spoke with, she feels obligated to continue to further her understanding of the Internet.

Finally, a less tangible effect of the Internet is the approach brought to the job. Drost thinks that because of the changing technology and the increased presence of the Internet in our professional lives, technical services librarians need to be "adaptable, flexible people willing to learn new things every year" and "people who enjoy working with computers." **Q**

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