ALA TechSource
www.alatechsource.org

Smart Libraries Newsletter
American Library Association
50 East Huron Street
Chicago, IL 60611-2795 USA

Address Service Requested

NON PROFIT
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT 4
HANOVER, PA

August 2009
BiblioCommons Prepares for Next Phase of Roll-out

Smart Libraries Newsletter

Smart Libraries Newsletter delivers hard data and innovative insights about the world of library technology, every month.

Editor
Dan Freeman
312-280-5413
dfreeman@ala.org

Contributing Editors
Tom Peters
816-616-6746
tpeters@tapinformation.com

Marshall Breeding
615-343-6094
marshall@breeding.com

Administrative Assistant
Judy Foley
800-545-2433, ext. 4272
312-280-4272
jfoley@ala.org

Production and design by Kimberly Saar Richardson, American Library Association Production Services.

Smart Libraries Newsletter is published monthly by ALA TechSource, a unit of the publishing division of the American Library Association.

Newsletter

ALA TechSource
www.alatechsource.org

Smart Libraries™

Formerly Library Systems Newsletter™

50 East Huron Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611-2795, USA

August 2009 Volume XXIX Number 8

ISSN 1541-8820

BiblioCommons Prepares for Next Phase of Roll-out

After a long period of development, testing and some delays, BiblioCommons appears poised to move forward as a contender in the arena of discovery interfaces. Developed by a Toronto-based company of the same name, BiblioCommons offers a new approach to the discovery interface that fully embraces social networking as a fundamental component in the way that patrons find and select resources from library collections.

BiblioCommons has been available at the Oakville Public Library in Ontario for public use since July 2008. Other deployments were in the works to follow on the heels of this implementation, but were delayed while the company resolved some issues with scaling and performance. In recent months these issues have been resolved and a number of installations are slated to take place by the end of 2009.

BiblioCommons Concepts

The basic premise of BiblioCommons centers on using social networking to enhance the ways in which patrons gain access to library collections. It brings social features into the very fabric of the online catalog.

The trajectory of user interaction initially begins with the discovery of resources, but expands as patrons interact with each other and take advantage of socially created data. The potential for interaction goes beyond those associated with their own library, as users can interact with the larger body of all libraries participating in BiblioCommons. The opportunities for resource discovery expand as recommendations, reviews, ratings and other social activities spark interest in other items from the library's collection. BiblioCommons aims to increase the use of the library's collection through social networking. It's able to move beyond positioning of a few of the most popular items to guiding patrons to discover materials throughout a much broader spectrum through socially created information and interactions.

Architecture and Technology

Like the majority of existing discovery interface products, BiblioCommons operates separately from the underlying integrated library system. Like the generic discovery interface model, data are harvested from the ILS and used to populate a separate search and retrieval environment. Products like Primo, Encore and AquaBrowser each harvest the

Continued on page 2

IN THIS ISSUE

Receive *Smart Libraries* via e-mail

Subscribers that would like an e-mailed version of the newsletter each month should forward one e-mail address and all of the mailing label information printed on page 8 of the newsletter to jfoley@ala.org. Type "e-mail my Smart Libraries" into the subject line. In addition to your monthly printed newsletter, you will receive an electronic copy via e-mail (to one address per paid subscription) at no extra charge each month.

metadata from the ILS and other local collections into an instance of the software specific to the implementation of a library or consortium. BiblioCommons takes a fairly radical departure in that data from the ILS of each participating library loads into a centralized site. From the perspective of the patron, the library may scope the search to a given library or region, but the fundamental concept of BiblioCommons involves broadly shared data. In addition to harvesting basic bibliographic records, BiblioCommons harvests holdings and item-level data as well as authority records. Even though BiblioCommons relies on a shared bibliographic database, it preserves and indexes any locally created cataloging.

One of the key issues with discovery interfaces is the way that they overlap and interact with the underlying ILS. BiblioCommons shares the concept of harvesting and synchronizing data describing the collection from the ILS, but into a collective service rather than library-specific implementations.

Some of the discovery interfaces tap into the online catalog features of the ILS for item-specific displays and services, such as placing a hold. BiblioCommons completely replaces the online catalog of the ILS, managing all aspects of the way that the patron interacts with the collection. Its emphasis on the patron and social interactions require a much more sophisticated approach than a simple hand off to the patron services functionality built into the online catalog module of the ILS.

BiblioCommons involves extensive use of patron data. It does not harvest the patron records from the ILS, but as patrons register on BiblioCommons, they are validated against their patron record in the ILS. All social features of BiblioCommons can be invoked only after the patron authenticates with the library-assigned username and pin. This requirement for authentication engenders a more trusted social environment.

The interactions between the ILS and BiblioCommons take place through a Web services layer which supports synchronization of the collection data as well as real-time interaction needs for current item status and patron requests.

Like many of its competitors, BiblioCommons relies on Apache Lucene and SOLR as its core search engine technology. Other components include PostgreSQL. Most of the server internals have been implemented in Java, including the data integration and service layer. The Web application layer was developed with Ruby on Rails, a very flexible programming environment that has recently seen widespread use in the open source community. BiblioCommons implements a service-oriented architecture, with an API made available through Web services. All communication between the BiblioCommons' own Web application and the internal server applications operate through the REST (representational state transfer) API, which is also available to the library for any custom applications it may choose to implement.

Communication between the ILS and BiblioCommons takes place through a software application that resides within the library's technical infrastructure. This connector manages the transfer and synchronization of bibliographic, item-level, and authority data between the ILS and BiblioCommons. This application monitors the ILS for any changes so that data can be synchronized in as close to real time as possible. The connector also handles the interactions with the circulation module and patron data needed as users make requests through BiblioCommons that involve the local ILS. The connectors involve programming specific to each ILS product, taking advantage of any API's that might be available as well as standard library protocols. BiblioCommons has been designed to operate with any ILS, though initially the connectors have been completed for SirsiDynix Horizon and Symphony; development of connectors for Innovative's Millennium, the open source Evergreen ILS and other ILS products are underway.

A Rich Interface

BiblioCommons incorporates the features that have become standard in this new genre of discovery interfaces. It offers simple and advanced search options, relevancy-ranked search results and the use of book jacket images for enhanced visual appeal and faceted navigation. The interface includes a checkbox labeled "available now" that limits results to items not currently checked out. When viewing an item, BiblioCommons includes a feature that allows the user to graphically browse the shelf, emulating the experience of the physical library.

BiblioCommons blends the Web site and the online catalog into a unified user experience. The library's main page draws from both from local content and from the services provided through BiblioCommons.

Pushing the Social Networking Concept to the Limit

While other discovery interfaces include some social networking features, BiblioCommons relies upon social data and interactions as a key part of its core functionality. Traditional online catalogs perform well in tasks involving locating items of a known author, title or subject. However, they do not do as good of a job with the more nebulous task of finding interesting material. Patrons benefit from services that highlight items within their sphere of interest that they may not have found through traditional online catalog searches. Posting lists of best sellers may expose some obvious items, but does not exploit the depth of material found

in library collections. BiblioCommons exploits socially generated content to help users discover a wider range of materials within their topics of interest.

BiblioCommons offers a user account feature designed to engage library patrons. The designers of BiblioCommons consider the point at which a patron performs actions such as reviewing items currently charged or requesting a renewal as an ideal time to invoke social networking features. It's when the patron may be ready to return an item that provides the best opportunity to provide a rating or review and to consider new reading materials.

BiblioCommons allows users to create reading lists of materials that not only help them keep track of what they have read, but that can be shared with others. Once shared, these lists become resources that help connect users with similar interests to help find related material. Browsing a list of items created by another patron can lead to the discovery of material that might not have been revealed through the usual search model. Users can write also reviews of any item, add tags, make comments, post a favorite quotation, rate the item for an appropriate age group, or post a video that might be related. All of these socially contributed data are associated with the user, so that other users can make connections with other users who have related interests, or establish networks of trust. When reading a review, patrons can register whether they trust its writer, either generally or on a particular topic.

One of the key ideas behind BiblioCommons involves the sharing of socially contributed data, not just within the group of users associated with a given library, but in a broader community of all the libraries involved with BiblioCommons.

Targeting Public Libraries

BiblioCommons has been designed specifically for public libraries. Each type of library brings its own set of needs to a discovery interface. BiblioCommons did some work with Queens University in Kingston, Ontario to test and refine BiblioCommons for the academic environment. It was eventually determined that the needs of academic libraries were substantially different and that BiblioCommons would maintain its focus on public libraries.

Current and Expected Deployments

BiblioCommons, under development since 2006, saw its initial roll-out when it went live at the Oakville Public Library in July 2008.

BiblioCommons is poised for deployment in a number of additional libraries. The Knowledge Ontario program purchased a master license, and has been actively involved in testing the product. Since the subscription cost has been absorbed at the provincial level, any library in Ontario can adopt BiblioCommons without cost for the next two years. Libraries in Ontario on track to implement BiblioCommons include the Ottawa Public Library, the Stratford Public Library, and Halton Hills.

The Provincial Library Services Branch in British Columbia has also purchased a master license, but the specific libraries that will initially implement BiblioCommons have not yet been determined.

In Alberta, the Edmonton Public Library will operate BiblioCommons with their SirsiDynix Symphony platform. According to Peter Schoenberg, testing of the new environment by staff will commence in July, with a public preview in August. The library anticipates using BiblioCommons as their default interface in September 2009.

Outside of Canada, libraries that have made a commitment to implement BiblioCommons include the Daniel Boone Regional Library in Missouri. The Yarra Plenty Regional Library Service in Australia has also indicated that it will implement BiblioCommons.

The California State Library provided funding for a two-year pilot project to test BiblioCommons. Califa Library Group will be the exclusive distributor for BiblioCommons to public libraries in California. Implementations are underway at the Santa Clara Public Library and the Oceanside Public Libraries in California. Palo Alto has also indicated an interest in testing the service.

BiblioCommons Company Background

BiblioCommons was founded in 2007 by Beth Jefferson, who now serves as the CEO. The company employs about 10 people and is based in Toronto, Ontario.

The beginnings of BiblioCommons can be traced to May 2006 when collaboration began among the provinces of Alberta, Ontario, and British Columbia to investigate the use of social networking concepts in library catalogs. (See http://www.thealbertalibrary.ab.ca/archives/archivedDocs/AR2006Contentv2.0.pdf).

BiblioCommons represents the culmination of a series of related projects initiated by Jefferson, who holds an MBA from Harvard. Prior to BiblioCommons, Jefferson was involved in The Perfink Project, an online teen literacy initiative created in partnership with the Toronto Public Library. In June 2004 Jefferson was awarded the Canadian IT Hero award from the Information Technology Association of Canada for her work on the BookTalk, a predecessor to the Perfink Project. These projects share a common theme with BiblioCommons of applying current online computing concepts to facilitating literacy and reading.

The funding behind BiblioCommons comes from contributions from library organizations and private investors. The

BC Public Libraries Branch, The Alberta Library, and the Ontario Library Association each contributed $50,000 to support the development of the BiblioCommons prototype. British Columbia and Ontario purchased two-year province-wide site licenses. These subscription prepayments and private investments financed the build-out of the prototype into a production platform.

BiblioCommons has been brewing largely behind the scenes for quite some time. With only one site in production, a year-long delay for refactoring the design to improve performance, and a Web site devoid of content, it has been difficult to assess the prospects of the project. With a number of libraries now on track to go forward with BiblioCommons by the end of the year, BiblioCommons seems poised to join the ranks of the major contenders in the discovery interface arena. Its unique approach to blending social networking into the discovery process lends it an interesting point of differentiation that many libraries may find attractive.

—Marshall Breeding

More Info. @:

www.bibliocommons.com

Oakville Public Library:
http://www.opl.on.ca/

Ingram Digital's MyiLibrary Audio Book Service

In April Ingram Digital officially launched its MyiLibrary Audio service for libraries, which has spent several years in the planning and development stages. Given that OverDrive launched its downloadable digital audio book in late 2004, followed soon in 2005 with the launch of what is now the NetLibrary/Recorded Books service, MyiLibrary Audio begins this race a few furloughs behind with OverDrive currently out front.

The May press release emphasized that MyiLibrary Audio is the first audio book service for library users that is fully compatible at launch with iPods and iPhones, including both Mac and PC users. For years OverDrive has been working to make their downloadable digital audio book service work more seamlessly with Macs, iPods, and iPhones. The recent release of version 3.2 of the OverDrive Media Console makes nearly all of OverDrive's protected WMA audio books playable on iPods, iPhones, and other heretofore incompatible playback devices. Competition begets compatibility.

Patrick Moore, Senior Account Executive from Ingram Digital, provided a demonstration of MyiLibrary Audio to me on June 26, 2009. Moore emphasized two differences with OverDrive's downloadable digital audio book service: MyiLibrary is fully compatible from the start with iPods across all titles and publishers (even on a Mac), and a larger percentage of a library's financial investment in a downloadable digital audio book service goes to purchasing content, rather than start-up fees, monthly platform fees, and other non-content costs.

The MyiLibrary master collection of audio book content currently includes approximately 7,000 titles from over twenty imprints, including Blackstone, Books on Tape, Random House, Simon & Schuster, Penguin and other publishers. Approximately15 percent of the titles in the collection are abridged. Moore estimated an average cost per copy of $40, which is comparable to OverDrive's average cost per copy.

When comparing the audio book master collections available from Ingram Digital, OverDrive, NetLibrary, and other vendors, it may be useful to compare not only the titles available and the prices, but also the file formats and playback devices supported, the gnarliness of any associated DRM, and the release date for recent high-demand titles. OverDrive has done a good job of making their audio book versions of new releases available the same day that printed (and Kindle) versions ship from Amazon. Ingram Digital is working to match that same-day delivery mark.

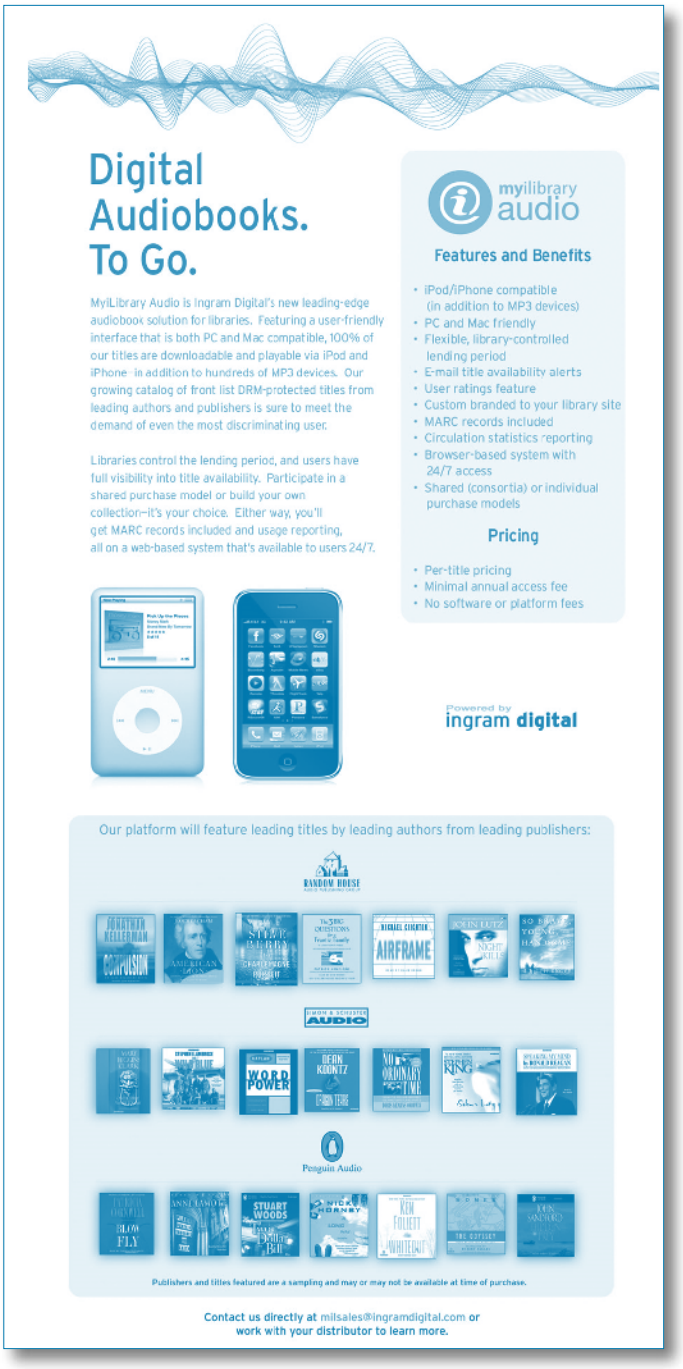
The books are delivered to the user's computer in the proprietary .IMM file format. The user may listen to the audio book on her or his computer using the Ingram Media Manager (also called the IMM), the software application used to manage the circulation, transfer, and playback of digital content. IMM works on both Macs and PCs. If you want to transfer an audio book to a portable playback device, the IMM will drop you right into iTunes if you are transferring content to an iPod, iPhone or other Apple device. If you transfer to a playback device that supports protected WMA (Windows Media Audio) files, you can convert the file at any time, then transfer to the device later. All of the audio books from MyiLibrary may be converted to either protected WMA or protected AAC file formats, which does a good job of clearing up user confusion on that front and cutting through the Gordian knot concerning which file formats will play on which portable playback devices.

Burning to CD, the third playback option, is currently available for approximately 25 percent of the titles available from MyiLibrary Audio, Moore estimates. The percentage of burnable content available from OverDrive is much higher.

There are several pricing options for MyiLibrary Audio books. Libraries may purchase title-by-title or in batches clustered around subject areas or publishers. Costs to participating libraries also include an annual access fee, but no monthly platform fees. Consortial pricing and purchase models are available, too. Moore reported that while MyiLibrary Audio currently has no "always available" options for accessing its content, an always available option is being developed. In the meantime, libraries and users must rely on the "one-copy, one-user-at-a-time" distribution model, which creates the need for holds and waiting lists.

Among the first libraries and library consortia to use the service are Baltimore County Public Library, Los Gatos Public Library, and the Califa Library Group. Califa is offering its member libraries the options of participating in a shared consortial collection, a standalone collection individualized for a specific library, or both. Heather Teysko from Califa reports that MyiLibrary Audio is very consortium-friendly. For example, even for shared collections, separate URLs can be generated for each library participating in the collection, so that the content website can be branded for each specific library. Also, the libraries participating in the Califa shared collection are welcome to purchase other MyiLibrary titles to add to their locally purchased collection of downloadable audio books. When a user from one of these libraries visits that library's unique MyiLibrary URL, the user experiences a collection of audiobooks where the consortially and locally purchased digital audiobooks are seamlessly and indiscernibly integrated into one collection.

MyiLibrary Audio has done some interesting things with the issues of lending periods and patron control. Most patrons want to check out and download an audio book when they want, listen to it, then check it back in. Most publishers, however, want a fixed, longer circulation period. Here's the way the MyiLibrary détente works: The maximum length of the lending period can be set by each participating library and consortium, with options ranging from 7 to 30 days. The publishers have insisted on a lending period of at least 7 days. Once the library has set the maximum lending period, individual users are free to set a circulation period (down to a day level) between the minimum and maximum for each circulation transaction that works best for them. For example, if a library chooses a maximum circulation period of 21 days, the individual user can decide within that window of 14 days (i.e., between 7 and 21 days), how long a circulation period he or she wants and needs to listen to that particular audio book in that particular situation. If you're downloading audio books for a ten-day road trip, set the circulation period for 11 days.



The annual access fee is based on the population served, ranging from $750 to $4500. Using MyiLibrary as your library's downloadable digital audio book service requires no set-up fees or platform fees.

Patron authentication is SIPP2-compatible, making it easy to weave this audio book service into your library's integrated library system.

Usage reports currently are delivered as spreadsheets, but Ingram Digital is working on an online, on-demand report writer.

The Ingram Media Manager has some nice features. In the advanced search, users can see titles that are new to the collection in the past week, month, or year. A 5-star rating system is in place. You can sort search results by patron rating. The "history" shows the audiobooks you have checked out in the past. After you checkout a book, but before you download it, you may return the book early. Call it browser remorse. Once you download, the circulation period selected takes hold.

Compared to its city cousin, the OverDrive Media Console, the Ingram Media Manager lacks a few features that may make it appear like a rustic swain. Evidently it doesn't sense the make, model, total memory, and available memory of any portable playback device when you connect it to your computer to transfer an audio book. Nor does it offer variable speed playback (without the Alvin and the Chipmunks effect), which is an essential feature for blind and low-vision users that is gaining some appreciation and use among the sighted population. A wish list feature has not yet been developed.

As library-based downloadable digital audio book services continue to develop and mature, some dark clouds surrounding who owns what and how to migrate content have begun to appear on the horizon. Content silos have a tendency to appear where angels fear to tread. All these downloadable digital audio book vendors are creating content silos. If a library is a customer of vendor A and decides to switch to Vendor B, the collection of digital audio books they purchased from Vendor A may not work with Vendor B's system, or Vendor A and the audio book rights holders of the content vended by Vendor A may fight the migration. Publishers are loathe to allow content migration, currently if not eternally.

Although OverDrive launched its service in late 2004 and NetLibrary/Recorded Books in 2005, Moore reported that Ingram Digital is not too concerned about starting this horse race late. He notes that many libraries have waited on the sidelines until a more iPod-friendly service became available, and smaller libraries may find Ingram Digital's pricing more attractive.

—Tom Peters

More Info. @:

http://www.ingramdigital.com/marketing/myilibraryaudio/index.html

DVL in DTLS

Many libraries and library consortia are giving serious consideration to starting or expanding the library-related content and services they provide to mobile phone users. The enticing idea is almost as simple as a syllogism. Nearly everyone in developed nations carries and uses mobile phones, and those devices are almost always on. In fact, the mobile phone may have the honor of being the manufactured item that has achieved the highest level of diffusion and use throughout the world's population in human history. It certainly beats personal computers, toasters, and toilets and perhaps even paper. It's not ludicrous to wonder if more people worldwide have touched a mobile phone than a piece of paper.

People use their mobile phones for many things: talking, text messaging, taking pictures and videos, reading ebooks, listening to audio books, organizing and carrying information, etc. Most of the statistical summaries indicate that mobile phone users are doing more text messaging than talking. This may be especially true for young people. It seems natural for libraries to try to deliver content and services to mobile phones. Many businesses and organizations are trying to tap into the mobile phone communication medium to deliver their services and products, too.

Although the idea is beautifully simple, the devil is in the details—dvl in dtls, in textspeak. For the past several months I have been serving as a member of the policy and procedures working group of the InfoQuest project team. InfoQuest is a collaborative pilot project involving over three dozen libraries, library consortia, and freelance librarians, providing a text messaging reference service to mobile phone users. Altarama has generously donated its text messaging reference platform for the five-month pilot project, and PeopleWhere has donated its powerful online group scheduling system. Both the project and the team are wonderful. Developing workable, intelligible, and fair policies and procedures for the project has reminded us all

how often complex issues and assumptions lurk between the lines of even the simplest of syllogisms. Here are a few examples:

- **Response(s):** Should we send an auto-response immediately to the person who posed a question to the service? If so, what message should be sent? We have to be cognizant of the fact that some mobile phone service providers charge a small fee for each text message sent or received. The InfoQuest team decided to send an auto-response only when the service was not being staffed during the overnight hours and some weekend hours. Another wrinkle within the response wrinkle is how many text messages should be sent in response to an incoming question. For the moment, we are not too worried about the number of text messages that may come in that, collected, constitute one question. We decided to limit our responses to two text messages, or a total of 320 characters. If a question comes in that requires more than 320 characters to answer adequately, we will refer the patron to some other reference channel, such as a web-based, phone-based, or even face-to-face-based reference service.
- **Response Time:** Like justice, the wheels of information provision and technical support often turn slowly. No one likes to stand waiting at a reference desk in a library or listening to Musak while waiting for the next available tech support representative to respond to their phone call. The all-too-common response that "We will respond to your request in one to two business days" is not acceptable to mobile phone users who are text messaging. The InfoQuest team decided to strive for an average response time (when the service is staffed) of ten minutes. Reports on the project will document the actual average response time achieved.
- **Hours of Service:** 24/7 is the goal, and increasingly the expectation of potential users of any text-messaging-based service. The InfoQuest project yearns to achieve that goal, but during the pilot project we had to deal with the fact that no service providers would be available during the overnight hours, generally from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m. Central Time. Not always being open raises several opening and closing procedural issues, as well as the need to deal with questions that arrive while the service is not staffed.
- **Images:** Wherever text goes, images soon follow. This may be an immutable law of information, just as where black and white goes, color soon follows. Should we allow or even encourage users of this service to send images as part of their reference questions? The example we used in our discussions was a mobile phone photo of a plant that the person thinks may be poison ivy. If a picture paints a thousand words, that has to be roughly 10,000 characters. Of course, if you decide to accept images, expect to receive images, including images that may be offensive or inscrutable. During the initial months of the pilot project, the mobile phone reference service we used was not able to accept images, but undoubtedly users will expect and want to send images as part of their reference questions. Wherever images go, moving images soon follow. That's a third immutable law.
- **Textspeak:** If you want to serve any population, you must communicate in a language they and you understand. For text messaging mobile phone users, that language is textspeak. Textspeak is an efficient and effective use of the 160-character limit set on a single text message. Lots of thorny issues here. How to help the InfoQuest reference librarian on duty to quickly and easily understand an incoming question in textspeak? Ten minutes can fly by as you simply try to understand the question or information need, let alone address it. We decided to provide the service providers with links to online textspeak translators and dictionaries. Should librarians respond in textspeak? It's efficient, but, if not used with grace and aplomb, it could make the librarian look as uncomfortable as an American in Paris. We decided to let each service provider find and use their comfort level concerning textspeak.

There are many more policy and procedural issues involved in providing what on the surface appears to be a simple text messaging reference service to mobile phone users, but eleven characters (spaces count as characters, too) may say it all: DVL in DTLS.

—Tom Peters

More Info. @:
http://www.myinfoquest.info/