Libraries in Multi-User Virtual Environments

The emerging popularity of multi-user virtual environments (MUVEs)—such as Second Life, which, as of mid-February, had more than three-and-a-half million registered avatars—could have a significant impact on:

1. librarians;
2. libraries and library-related organizations;
3. librarianship, i.e., the practical aspects of our profession;
4. library science, i.e., the theoretical aspects of our profession.

Of these four separate but related spheres of influence, individual librarians have been the first to venture into and be influenced by MUVEs. These pioneering librarians are raising interesting questions and ideas about librarianship and library science in virtual environments, and as a result of the pathfinding efforts of individual librarians, libraries and library-related organizations are beginning to colonize MUVEs.

In previous issues of *SLN*, I have written about the Alliance Second Life Library 2.0 project and the emerging Info Archipelago populated by libraries, library schools, and for-profit and not-for-profit library-related entities. The Alliance Second Life Library 2.0 project has had tremendous early success, especially in light of the fact it is largely a volunteer effort at this point. But there are other library projects in Second Life and other MUVEs that

warrant our attention. This month I'll focus on the Librarium initiative in Second Life.

Virtual Vectors

On January 19, 2007, my avatar, Maxito Ricardo, met in-world with the avatar JJ Drinkwater, one of the leading lights behind the Librarium project. JJ began by noting the Librarium building has been in Second Life for quite some time, predating the Alliance Second Life Library 2.0 project, which commenced in April 2006. The land and building was donated (by the previous owner) to JJ's group, which is comprised of private individuals who are librarians, computer people, digitizers, and the like in real life.

The full name of the project is the "Librarium and Philosopher's Club"; the name reflects the notion that this is a place for literate conversation, similar to what was found in real-world coffee houses in the late 18th century (not in the early 21st century—sorry, Starbucks).

JJ wonders if the purview of libraries in MUVEs will be focused more on conversation than on gathering collections of information objects. Members of JJ Drinkwater's group wonder if conversation is closer to the molten core of culture than a bunch of crusty information objects. Here's a quote from the text chat transcript from an earlier meeting of the group: "The library has for a long time been a

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> **That is one of the most fascinating things about librarianship in MUVEs: these environments can force both the creators and the users to question many, if not all, of the basic assumptions we hold about information, libraries, library services, knowledge generation, etc.**

space where people congregate to create knowledge and to learn, to form social communities [and] bonds over shared conversations. The books, exhibits, and whatnot, inspire, supplement, and provide the genesis for these conversations. I think preserving knowledge is an important but incidental portion of fulfilling this."

And conversation in a virtual environment could mean creating things as well as engaging in lively, worthwhile conversation. In MUVEs, the distinction between talking the talk and walking the walk may become moot. And creating things need not only be limited to texts, but also extended to producing objects,

scripts, and entire environments. Imagine, for example, an art exhibit where viewers can create art objects and other things in response to the works on display. Or a group of viewers could alter and contribute to a work of art. This could give new meaning to the word "wikimedia."

JJ said the group wanted a place in Second Life ". . .where we could throw out as many assumptions about libraries as we wanted, with no orthodoxies to respect." That is one of the most fascinating things about librarianship in MUVEs: these environments can force both the creators and the users to question many, if not all, of the basic assumptions we hold about information, libraries, library services, knowledge generation, etc. JJ and the group wonder what libraries can bring to MUVEs that performance spaces, exhibit spaces, coffee houses, and links out to the Web cannot perform without being under a library rubric.

If this all sounds too stuffy, it's not. When I met JJ in the Librarium, I accepted an invitation from an object to "chill." Without pausing to try to disambiguate what "chill" might mean in this MUVE context, I boldly chose to chill. My avatar ended up prone on a rug, with my knees bent and my feet swaying idly in the air, and with my hands holding an open book. I looked a little like Christopher Robin.

After my interview with JJ in Librarium, I surmised that ours was a very stimulating conversation, even though it was "old school"—in the sense that we did not create anything, other than a bunch of ideas and a text chat transcript.

In trying to summarize my first visit to the Librarium and Philosopher's Club, I keep coming back to the distinction between "visiting" a library, which is often how we describe what we do in real life, with "being part" of a library, in the sense of a contributor to a form of conversation where ideas, objects, and environments are created, scrutinized, and refined.—*Tom Peters*

More Info. @:

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Second Life, www.secondlife.com

Second Life Library 2.0, http:// infoisland.org

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THE ILS SCOOP BY MARSHALL BREEDING

FRONT-END FOCUS

Following an active period in which major news in the ILS domain erupted almost every month—a wave of consolidations and buy outs rolled through the vendor library-automation industry in 2006—this year began with a period of relative quiet. The companies involved in these business transitions seem to be busy with sorting out their new organizations.

Given at least a brief respite in major events to report, this month in *The ILS Scoop* I will focus on reporting smaller developments and progress on ongoing initiatives.

Searching Solutions

In response to end-user expectations for easier-to-use search interfaces as well as to the overall widespread dissatisfaction with the previous generation of online catalogs, those in the library field are witnessing a flurry of vendor activity toward the development of new front-end interfaces. These new interfaces aim not only to be better online catalogs, but to also more fully encompass all aspects of the content that libraries offer to users. Speaking broadly, these new interfaces aim to bring together the online catalog, subscribed resources, and/or locally created content, using search technologies and interface techniques that have been well established in Web-based services outside the library domain. Today, Web-savvy users expect relevancy ranking of results, faceted navigation to drill down through result sets, comprehensive search domains, and a visually rich environment.

Endeca ProFind

In 2006, Endeca's ProFind and Guided Navigation products attracted a great deal of interest. The launch of a new catalog based on Endeca technology at the North Carolina State University (NCSU) Libraries in January 2006 was followed by implementations at the Phoenix Public Library, and others are underway as well. In October 2006, those at McMaster University Library in Canada announced intentions to implement an Endeca-based catalog. The Endeca approach so far has found an audience among libraries with significant technical expertise and relatively deep pockets.

TLC and AquaBrowser Library

AquaBrowser Library has gained an even broader following among U.S. public libraries, ranging from Queens Borough Public Library (one of the largest and busiest public libraries in the country), to dozens of small and mid-sized public libraries.

The Library Corporation (TLC) holds an exclusive contract to license the AquaBrowser Library product in the U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, and the Philippines from its developer, Netherlands-based Medialab Solutions. To date, TLC has sold AquaBrowser Library to more than120 libraries; in 2006 alone it garnered 71 sales. Recognizing TLC's successful marketing, Medialab Solutions renewed its contract (which commenced in January 2006) for another three years.

The Library Corporation also markets the Endeca technology through an agreement established in June 2004. Libraries can acquire the Endeca technology either directly from Endeca or through TLC. Although NCSU obtained the technology from Endeca, Phoenix Public went through TLC.

Two library-automation companies have efforts underway to develop even more ambitious library interfaces. In other articles I've written for *SLN*, I've covered the announcements of Encore (developed by Innovative Interfaces, see *SLN* July 2006) and Primo (from Ex Libris, see *SLN* March 2006), in which I described the architecture and features of each. There has been a flurry of activity on both of these product-development fronts to engage libraries as development partners and to ready the products for general release. Encore and Primo are expected to be delivered for production use in 2007.

Encore

Following the May 2006 Encore announcement—which positioned it as a "unified search and access tool" —Innovative Interfaces, by October 2006, had enlisted an initial cadre of libraries to partner in its development. These libraries included: Binghamton University, part of the State University of New York (SUNY) system that uses ALEPH from Ex Libris as its integrated library system (ILS); Deakin University in Australia; Deschutes Public Library in Oregon; Georgetown University; Michigan State University; Nashville

THE ILS SCOOP

Public Library in Tennessee; Scottsdale Public Library in Arizona; Springfield-Greene County Library in Missouri; the Tri-College Library Consortium in Pennsylvania (Bryn Mawr, Haverford, and Swarthmore); University of Glasgow in Scotland; University of Queensland Library in Australia; Westerville Public Library in Ohio; and Yale University's Lillian Goldman Law Library.

In mid-December 2006, Innovative announced the University of Kentucky Libraries (which uses Voyager as its ILS) had joined the Encore development group. In January 2007, Jefferson County Public Library in Colorado, Miami University in Ohio, University of Western Ontario, and Wright State University in Ohio had also signed on as development sites. Previews of Encore were given to library staff at the Scottsdale Public Library in Arizona and the Yale Law Library in mid-December 2006. The Encore partner libraries now total eighteen (including twelve academic libraries and six public). Of these, sixteen libraries utilize Millennium as their ILS, one runs Voyager, and one runs ALEPH.

Primo

Ex Libris began its efforts toward developing components of Primo—its new "user-centric discovery and delivery" tool—with hbz (the University Library Center of North-Rhine Westphalia), a large consortium in Germany. In June 2006, the company announced two U.S. development partners, Vanderbilt University and the University of Minnesota. An additional partner comprised of several entities, the "Primo Charter Members Program," was announced in January 2007. The Primo Charter Members Program includes Boston College; the College Center for Library

Automation, a consortium of twenty-seven community colleges in Florida; the Cleveland Museum of Art; Iowa State University; the University of Iowa; and the University of East Anglia.

In addition to partnering with hbz to advance Primo on the international front, Ex Libris has also partnered with a Danish consortium of research libraries that includes The Royal Library, The Technical Knowledge Centre of Denmark, Aalborg University, and the Danish Administrative Library.

SchoolRooms

SirsiDynix has been working to develop a number of interface and portal products. Although the company has been promoting its Rooms interface since about 2003, it has had limited sales results. In 2006, the company created a specialized version of the product tailored for school libraries. Called "SchoolRooms," this version of the product found a more enthusiastic response.

INFOhio, a cooperative network for schools in Ohio, was one of the earliest adopters of SchoolRooms. Among other activities, INFOhio provides a shared library-automation system used by 480 school districts representing more than 2,400 individual school libraries. Originally, INFOhio implemented a MultiLIS automation system from DRA in 1994; in 2003 migration began to Unicorn. Beginning in 2005, INFOhio partnered with SirsiDynix to create a specialized version of Rooms for schools, collaborating with the company to identify content in order to create and populate virtual rooms with appropriate content. By year-end 2006, SchoolRooms had been deployed to two of the school districts in INFOhio, a step on the way to deploying the product throughout the network.

The Boston Public Library selected SchoolRooms to provide a learning portal for K–12 students throughout the city. It will provide access to the K–12 students and teachers in each of its 27 branches and in homes and classrooms through the library's Web site.

Philadelphia Safe and Sound, a child advocacy agency that operates 135 after-school programs, selected SchoolRooms to deliver hand-selected appropriate content to the students it serves.

SirsiDynix has launched a new Web site, www.schoolrooms.net, devoted to this product. ∎

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Primo Overview, www.exlibrisgroup.com/primo.htm

SirsiDynix SchoolRooms, "A New Learning Portal for the K–12 Community," www.schoolrooms.net

Executive Shifts at Infor Library Solutions and OCLC PICA

OCLC PICA has not only acquired a number of library-automation companies and products in its buying spree over the last two years (Sisis Informationssysteme in June 2005, Fretwell Downing Informatics in November 2006, and Openly Informatics in January 2006), the for-profit part of OCLC (Online Computer Library Center) has now recruited a top executive from the ILS realm. (See *SLN*, February 2006 [26:2], "OCLC's Ongoing Open Season on Acquisitions," p.1.)

Effective March 1, 2007, Eric van Lubeek joins OCLC PICA as the Director of Operations and Services. Van Lubeek, a twenty-year veteran of the ILS industry, comes from Infor Library Solutions, where he headed the company as managing director.

For those keeping score, the beginnings of Infor Library Systems can be traced to Geac, a major supplier of library-automation technology that prospered in the U.S. and Canada through the 1990s. In late 2005, Geac was acquired by Golden Gate (see *SLN* May 2006 [26:5], "Geac Morphs into Extensity Library Solutions," p. 3). At that time, part of the company was folded into Infor, an existing company owned by Golden Gate. The remainder of the company, including the library solutions unit, was placed within a newly formed company called "Extensity."

Extensity Library Solutions was short lived, however. Infor acquired Extensity in August 2006, creating Infor Library Solutions. Although Infor currently has a small presence in the U.S., its Vubis Smart product (its flagship ILS) prospers in parts of Europe.
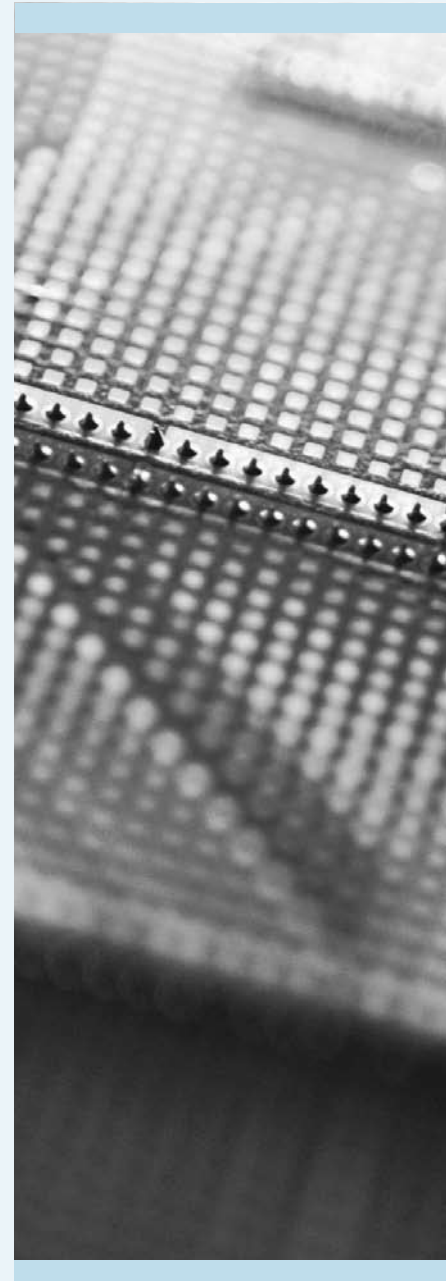
Business integration isn't necessarily fast with large entities such as Infor. When I was writing and gathering information for this article, I discovered the Web site for the library division can only be accessed through the geac.com domain, but sports the Extensity brand on its banner and refers to the division as "Infor Library Systems."

At OCLC PICA, van Lubeek will oversee the Operations & Services division and will be responsible for the deployment of the organization's products and services, customer service and support, and for maintenance of technology infrastructure. Van Lubeek will serve on the OCLC PICA Board of directors, and he will report to Rein van Charldorp, the managing director of OCLC PICA.

In January 2007 at Infor Library Solutions, Ann Melaerts was promoted to managing director fill the top position vacated by van Lubeek. Melaerts has been involved with Geac/Extensity/Infor for fifteen years and was previously the general manager for the Southern Europe Region for Infor. ∎

More Info. @:
"New Director of Operations & Services: Eric van Lubeek," www.oclcpica.org/dasat/index.php?cid=100697&conid=101827&sid=601675ac730e55a29ec7716bdb1bbd00
Infor Library Solutions, www.library.geac.com/page/home_LIB.html

Can Search Engines Be WIKIFIED?

Today Britannica, tomorrow Google!

In late December 2006, Jimmy Wales, one of the founders (or the founder—it's a point he disputes with Larry Sanger) of the Wikipedia communal resource, announced plans to develop an open source wiki-based search engine. The search engine will be called "Search Wikia."

In a message posted to the Search Wikia Web site on December 23, Jimmy ("Jimbo") Wales noted that searching—which he asserts is part of the fundamental infrastructure of the Internet—is currently broken "…for the same reason that proprietary software is always broken: lack of freedom, lack of community, lack of accountability, lack of transparency."

Wales believes that relevancy-ranking algorithms cannot do as good a job of judging relevance as can a large group of users applying their human discernment and judgment to search results. If a system to harness, analyze, and present the evolving wisdom of the crowd could be developed, relevancy-ranking algorithms could face some stiff competition.

While Google has been singing at the top of its lungs, "I've got algorithm, who could ask for anything more?" (sung to the tune, "I've Got Rhythm"), Jimbo and the wiki crowd have been marching to a different drummer. In a late 2006 interview with Danny Sullivan from Search Engine Land (see URL in "More Info. @"), Wales noted the first version of Search Wikia will be based in part on Nutch and Lucene, two existing open-source search software programs.

Although Search Wikia hopes to take on Google and the other major search engines by offering a fresh alternative to relevancy algorithm-driven searching, Search Wikia plans to follow the same basic business model of the major search engines by relying on advertising revenue to float the boat.

Wading through the Wikis

It's time to differentiate and sort all these wiki projects. Search Wikia is part of Mr. Wales's for-profit company Wikia, while Wikipedia is operated under the not-for-profit Wikimedia

Foundation. Amazon is a major investor in the Wikia company, but Wales insists that Amazon is not directly involved in the Search Wikia project. Search Wikia is a different project entirely than that of the Wikisearch beta project Wikiseek—which is a collaborative project involving SearchMe to provide a search engine to Wikipedia articles and related links. (Next month there will be a pop quiz over these distinctions.)

Librarians have known for years that human involvement in the online searching process—beyond merely typing in the search terms—can provide beneficial results. How will the Search Wikia project be different than the mediated online search services of yore? During the era of mediated online searching, each search mediator had to develop the skills and "wisdom of the crowd" in order to construct and deliver an efficient, effective set of search results top-loaded with pertinent results. Search Wikia will try to build this wisdom-building activity into the system.—*Tom Peters*

More Info. @:
Search Wikia, http://search.wikia.com
"Q&A with Jimmy Wales on Search Wikia," by Danny Sullivan, http://searchengineland.com/061229-193718.php
Wikimedia Foundation, http://wikimediafoundation.org
WikiSeek Beta, "A Better Way to Search Wikipedia," www.wikiseek.com

Google Corner(ed)
BY TOM PETERS

UT-Austin Joins the Google Gaggle

In mid-January the University of Texas at Austin announced it had joined Google's massive book digitization project. The multi-year plan is to scan about one million books from the libraries' collections (which are comprised of approximately nine million volumes). What gets scanned will be based upon selection lists developed by those at the University of Texas Libraries.

The UT-Austin press release stresses the same topics—copyright issues, preservation opportunities, and the speed and felicities attendant upon this collaboration among corporate, private, and public organizations—found in previous press releases from the other members of the Association of Research Libraries collaborating with Google. Dennis Dillon, the associate director for research services at the UT-Austin Libraries, emphasized the value of this project as a broad and deep tool for intellectual discovery of content contained in the collections.

The public universities involved in this and similar projects often point to how these massive digitization efforts will enable the public to have unprecedented access to major chunks of these research collections. Still, I am not entirely convinced that these universities have developed detailed scenarios on how broad public access to this emerging patchwork quilt of millions of scholarly books could affect the very warp and woof of universities in society and the life of the mind.

In a recent ALA TechSource Blog post, I termed this potentially profound trend "the rustication of expertise" (see URL in "More Info. @"), whereby scholars and researchers unaffiliated with universities will play an increasingly important role in the overall advance of knowledge. If, fueled by these massive digitization projects, something like the rustication of expertise does accelerate, it could alter the relationship between research universities and society.
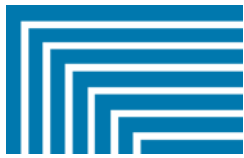
The newsworthiness of these announcements continues to decline as more partners come on board. The urge to suppress a yawn, shrug one's shoulders, or cluck one's tongue increases. Nevertheless, if this massive digitization project proceeds at roughly the pace and scope that have been announced, the result could be a major force in future trends in scholarly communication and intellectual inquiry. ■

More Info. @:

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Virtual Libraries or Bust! Talking and Trailblazing Library Services in MUVEs

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