



Smart Libraries

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Under the Linden Tree

During the six months I have been active in Second Life—the three-dimensional virtual-reality environment—I have had an increasing curiosity about Linden Lab, the private company that owns and maintains Second Life. In mid-October I had an opportunity to meet someone who works at Linden Lab and hear him speak. John Lester coordinates educational activities for Linden Lab. His in-world avatar is named “Pathfinder Linden.” All Linden Lab employees, and only they, use the last name of “Linden” for their avatars in Second Life. John was the keynote speaker at a one-day conference (organized by the Alliance Library System held in East Peoria, Illinois) on the general topic of three-dimensional virtual worlds and potential roles for libraries in them.

Lester reported the current avatar population in Second Life is growing at the rate of 20 percent per month. He predicted by late October Second Life would surpass the one million mark in terms of registered avatars.

A quick check at the end of October confirmed the number of avatars indeed met and exceeded the one million mark, with more than 1.1 million registered avatars. Although it is possible for one individual to have more than one avatar, it appears safe to say that nearly one million people worldwide have taken the time to create and register an avatar. Nearly 500,000 registered avatars have been logged on to Second Life in the last 60 days.

Looking into the Life

Like the early days of the World Wide Web, American citizens dominated the content and activity in Second Life, noted Lester. He estimated that U.S. citizens create approximately 70 percent of all avatars, but that percentage is declining, largely due to non-U.S. residents of planet Earth spurring the current growth. Surprisingly, the East Coast is better represented by citizen-avatars in Second Life than the West Coast. Pathfinder lives in the Boston area, and Lester noted the only reason Second Life Time is synchronized to the Pacific Time Zone is because that’s where the server farm is located.

Whenever someone refers to Second Life as a game, I always am taken aback and feel the faint urge to go research in depth the philosophy of gaming. If Second Life is a game, then so is real life. In his remarks Lester also stressed that Second Life is “fundamentally not a game.” It is a platform. Second Life is more like the Web than like *World of Warcraft* or *Everquest*. There is no goal to Second Life; there is no way to win, or even to gain advanced powers through your in-world quests.

Resident-avatars create everything in Second Life, and Linden Lab provides the tools to create things “in-world.” Individuals own their intellectual property.

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Everything in Second Life is streamed to each individual avatar in real time—hence the computational and bandwidth bars are currently rather high. As of mid-fall 2006, Second Life had approximately 90 square miles of land, spread across a mainland and numerous islands. Linden Lab has 3,500 servers to keep this “landmass” flying.

More than 2 million avatar-hours are spent in Second Life each month, and Second Life tends to mirror human interests and creativity. In addition, Second Life residents are older and more gender-balanced than most online environments. The median age is about 35, and female avatars spend as much time in Second Life as male avatars. Lester noted the primitive objects, used to create everything in Second life, are like “Lego blocks on steroids.” Also, the Linden Scripting Language can be used to animate objects.

Lester applauded the volunteer librarian-avatars for their innovative ways of presenting information in Second

Lester reported about 100 colleges and universities have become significantly active in Second Life. They are buying land—collectively, approximately 17,000 acres to date—constructing buildings, and holding classes, symposia, lectures, and other events. Some buildings, such as Altgeld Hall on Glidden Island owned by Northern Illinois University, are almost exact replicas of their real-world counterparts.

Other colleges and universities are creating in-world campuses that try to improve on the real-world campuses. For example, one university with a depressingly mediocre real-world student union created a fantastic one in Second Life. Some of the architecture in Second Life has little or no correlation with the real world; numerous buildings float in the air.

The prospects for learning in Second Life are encouraging. Because everyone in Second Life has an avatar, there is a feeling of group presence and process. Lester noted whereas as most distance-education

one or more avatars can fly around it or through it. Your avatar can even ride the molecule and let out a “Whoop!”—like Slim Pickens’s character did in Stanley Kubrick’s brilliant send up of the atomic age *Dr. Strangelove*.

Because academic institutions seem to be moving into Second Life with vigor, it makes sense for academic and research libraries to begin exploring and beta testing some library activities. There’s already movement in regard to library services in-world: the Alliance Library System’s Second Life Library 2.0 officially launched in October, and the beautiful library on the New Media Consortium’s island campus became much more active this fall.

Librarians from several libraries are beginning to gain firsthand knowledge of the information needs and preferences of student-avatars and professor-avatars. Several specialty libraries have begun to crop up, too. For example, the new HealthInfo Island will contain at least two libraries, one focusing on consumer health information and the other on health information for healthcare professionals. —*Tom Peters*

More info. @:

Second Life, <http://secondlife.com>
Second Life Library 2.0, <http://infoisland.org/>

“My Avatar Wears Tight Jeans and 4 Other Things I Learned at Internet Librarian,” by Michael Stephens, www.techsource.ala.org/blog/2006/10/my-avatar-wears-tight-jeans-and-4-other-things-i-learned-from-internet-librarian-2006.html

“The Great Pumpkin Farm Community,” by Tom Peters, www.techsource.ala.org/blog/2006/10/the-great-pumpkin-farm-community.html

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Life, and he reminded the conference attendees there are real people behind the avatars in Second Life—these are not artificial-intelligence constructs, although AI experiments in Second Life are not unknown.

Learning in Second Life

The autumn semester of 2006 may be remembered as the first major semester of higher-education use of Second Life.

communication and delivery systems have low bandwidth for the emotional part of human-human interaction, Second Life encourages it, including body language, gestures, and facial expressions.

The ability to interact with an information space can be complex and diverse. Lester demonstrated an in-world device that will build (on demand) a “molecule”—as bidden by the avatar—in the “air” above an avatar’s head. Once the molecule has been built,

The Zen of the Citizendium



It was only a matter of time before the Wikipedia got some direct apples-to-apples competition, and it's coming from—surprise—one of the disenchanted original co-founders of Wikipedia, Larry Sanger. You cannot become one of the most visited destination Web sites and not expect someone to try to build a better mousetrap.

The goal of the new Citizendium, notes a press release about the project, will be to create an online encyclopedia that is not only “. . .enormous and free, but [also] reliable.” The project leaders plan to accomplish this by developing a more structured underlying community of core-content contributors.

According to the project's Web site, the Citizendium will become “. . . a citizens' compendium of everything . . . an experimental new wiki project that combines public participation with gentle expert guidance.”

Of course the announcement of the formation of Citizendium generated lots of comment in the blogosphere. A long, detailed post to the Modern Dragons blog by Mike Johnson caught my eye as especially thorough and thoughtful.

Sanger and others involved in the creation of Citizendium feel the Achilles heel of Wikipedia is its championing of enthusiastic amateurism over expertise. Sanger seems not so much concerned about the quality and truth-value of Wikipedia's content but about what he

perceives as fundamental flaws in the structure and values of the underlying community of content contributors. He thinks, over time, true experts, primarily academics, will become disgruntled and leave the Wikipedia community. If and when this mass disgruntlement sets in, if it has not already, Sanger hopes many of these defectors will move over to the Citizendium community.

Sanger asserts that other problems within the Wikipedia community are begat by general anonymity and the increasing insularity of the core leadership. The Citizendium plans to have signed articles. This makes me want to go back and study the arguments for and against the decision made by *The Times Literary Supplement* to migrate from unsigned to signed reviews.

The Citizendium plans to launch its own online encyclopedia in a couple of months. It will not start from scratch but will actually use a snapshot of the Wikipedia content. The difference will be on how the Citizendium community will move on from there to edit and improve that content.

As Johnson notes, “Citizendium. . . attempts to provide a workspace which benefits from both Wikipedia-style collaboration and academic scholarly norms by abolishing anonymity, courting the academics who are primed to ‘get’ wikis, and promoting a culture of deference to experts.”

After the Citizendium has been in operation for six months to one year, the organizers plan to promulgate a community charter, which will spell out the social contract of this community of volunteers, including both experts and the great unwashed.

The Citizendium online community also will eventually have a constabulary to enforce the charter and to ban offenders. “The Chief Constable for the project is Ruth Ifcher, who played early, key roles in the Citizendium's predecessors, Nupedia and Wikipedia. The project mailing lists are being hosted by Purdue University. . .,” states the press release.

Someone should start a blog containing amusing little tidbits from the missives from the forthcoming Citizendium constabulary, akin to the “constabulary notes from all over” column-fillers that the *New Yorker* magazine has run for years.—Tom Peters

More info. @:

“Co-Founder to Launch Edited Version of Wikipedia,” http://citizendium.org/release_001.html
“Citizendium,” by Mike Johnson (from the Modern Dragons blog), “Speculations on the Frontiers of Science and Culture,” <http://moderndragons.blogspot.com/2006/10/citizendium.html>

THE ILS SCOOP BY MARSHALL BREEDING

WebFeat's Three-Prong Plan for Advancing Federated Search

This past fall, WebFeat, one of the major companies specializing in federated-search products for libraries, advanced its product strategy on three fronts. The first involves enlisting a higher degree of cooperation with the publishers targeted by its federated-search products. Secondly, the company introduced a version of its search product geared for the international arena, offering better support for localized languages in the interface. On the third front, WebFeat recently launched a version of its product designed for library consortia.

A Benefit for Libraries

In order to create easier connections between its federated-search platform and the myriad targeted information resources, WebFeat launched its initiative, the "WebFeat Friendly Partnership Program." As libraries increasingly embrace federated search as one of the primary means for providing access to the information resources to which they subscribe—and as WebFeat continues to gain ground as the dominant provider of federated-search technologies—it becomes increasingly important to optimize the way information resources interact with WebFeat's technology.

Although WebFeat can force almost any information resource into its federated-searching environment, libraries gain significant advantages when the resource providers actively cooperate with federated-search developers. It's much better for information providers to offer an XML gateway or other API to access their systems than to force federated-search developers to develop connectors based on the HTML presentation of their Web interfaces.

A few information-resource providers have resisted the movement toward federated search but can do little to prevent companies like WebFeat from engineering connectors that integrate their content by mimicking a user and parsing the HTML. The current trend, fortunately, involves increased cooperation between the information providers and the federated-search developers.

The WebFeat Friendly Partnership program provides information providers an opportunity to actively cooperate with WebFeat in delivering access to their resources. Those that already offer an XML gateway into their products already qualify for inclusion in the program. WebFeat lists the following companies as initial participants in the program: ABC-CLIO, Alexander Street Press, ARTstor,

EBSCO, Elsevier, Facts on File, H. W. Wilson, IEEE, JSTOR, Lexis-Nexis, Naxos, NewsBank, and Thomson Gale.

For Library Consortia

Designed to accommodate advanced requirements for operating a federated-search environment by a consortium on behalf of its many individual libraries, the company launched the WebFeat Enterprise Edition. This version of the WebFeat federated-search environment includes an enhanced set of tools that provide such functions as multi-site authentication, the ability to configure multiple configuration profiles, and multiple levels of usage reporting. This version of the product incorporates features already in use at some of WebFeat's existing multi-library implementations.

About a dozen statewide or multi-library networks rely on WebFeat, including the Consortium of Academic Research Libraries in Illinois; Georgia's statewide GALILEO virtual-library project; the Louisiana Library Network; the New York Online Virtual Electronic Library; the Ohio Public Library Information Network; the Southeast Florida Library Information Network; and the resources offered through the state libraries in Arizona, Louisiana, New York, Nevada, and Oregon. eiNetwork, a network of more than eighty libraries in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County in Pennsylvania will be the company's first customer for its technologies packaged as "WebFeat Enterprise Edition."

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Beyond Borders

Also, broadening its appeal to international libraries, the company recently launched WebFeat Express International Edition. This version includes the ability to select the language employed by the search interface seen by the systems' users as well as the interface that administrators use for selecting configuration options. WebFeat has

a broad international presence with customers in eighteen countries, including China, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Singapore, South Korea, Switzerland, Thailand, and Turkey. ■

More info. @:

"WebFeat Launches WebFeat Enterprise Edition for Multi-Library Networks," www.webfeat.org/releases/1Oct06_Enterprise.htm

"WebFeat Launches 'WebFeat Friendly' Partnership Program for Content Providers," www.webfeat.org/releases/2Oct06_WFFriendly.htm

"WebFeat Launches WebFeat Express International Edition," www.webfeat.org/releases/1Nov06_International.htm

Auto-Graphics Teams with Quova for Geolocated Authentication

Auto-Graphics, a library-automation vendor specializing in large-scale resource-sharing systems and one that has implemented several statewide projects, has recently partnered with Quova to incorporate Quova's solution for authenticating users.

The resource-sharing systems developed by Auto-Graphics involve union catalogs that list the resources within the libraries located in the service area and may also include access to research databases licensed from commercial publishers.

Enter Quova

One of the challenges in these large-scale systems involves providing a mechanism for identifying authorized users. In a statewide system, for example, all residents of the state should enjoy access, making it important to be able to grant access to a person—who is requesting access to a given resource—physically located in the service area (such as a resident of the state). The structure of the Internet, however, doesn't tie users to physical locations, and although every device on the Internet must have a unique address,

these addresses are usually assigned without regard to physical location.

Quova specializes in the technologies that solve this "geolocation problem." Although no hard and fast relationship exists between the address of an Internet user and his or her physical location, there are a lot of clues and patterns that can help with the geolocation problem. Quova offers a variety of services surrounding the problem of identifying the physical location of individual Web users.

Where in the World

The developers at Quova have accumulated extensive data about Internet structure to aid in the process of mapping an IP address to the physical world. It isn't always possible to pinpoint a user's location with precision, so Quova assigns a confidence ranking with each geolocation result. Some organizations employ international proxies that make geolocation difficult. Dial-up users, especially from such international providers as American Online (AOL), pose difficulties since their entry points to the telephone system cannot be determined from the IP network.

Users that hide their identities through anonymizer services also stymie geolocation services.

Based in Mountain View, California, Quova was founded in 2000 and is backed by a group of venture capital funds, including Mobius Venture Capital, IDG Ventures, Nexus Group, and Schoffstall Ventures.

Geolocation finds a number of applications in the world of e-commerce, for instance:

- It can be used as a factor in isolating fraudulent credit card purchases;
- Federal regulations often require banks and other financial organizations to know the locations of their customers;
- Gambling sites must be able to identify if a customer is in a state or country where the activity is legal; and
- Geolocation allows Web sites to control what ads are served and to localize content based on the user's location.

Libraries and other organizations that deal with distributing electronic content can use geolocation as a component of

THE ILS SCOOP

digital rights management (DRM). Many license agreements impose restrictions on who may view content based on geographical location.

Connecting in Connecticut

For Auto-Graphics, partnering with Quova gives it the technology for more convenient user authentication in its statewide resource-sharing systems. For example, iCONN (a component of the Connecticut Education Network) is a customer that utilizes an Auto-Graphics provided resource-sharing system. iCONN licenses a number of information resources on behalf of the faculty, students, and residents of the state of Connecticut. In order to satisfy the terms

of the license agreements and to make resource access convenient for its users, iCONN can offer this highly desirable functionality—authenticating its users based on geolocation.

Because the content and resources of iCONN are only available to residents of the state of Connecticut, one of the key issues involves devising ways to limit access. One method, which was already in place, involves having users enter their library card numbers. The system can then check to see if the number provided is associated with one of the libraries in the state; however, this method is not viable for residents without library cards. So, the service provided by Auto-Graphics (via Quova's IP Geolocation service), allows residents to enter the site automatically.

Only those with IP addresses who cannot be geolocated within the state have to enter a library card number to gain access. This approach allows access to a larger portion of the eligible population and makes access much more convenient. ■

More info. @:

iConn, www.iconn.org

"Auto-Graphics Integrates Quova Technology to Offer Libraries Leading-Edge Geolocation Authentication Capabilities," www4.auto-graphics.com/news/pressreleaseshow.asp?id=20060913

Quova, www.quova.com

Internationally Recognized ILL Expert Joins Auto-Graphics

Another major development at Auto-Graphics involves the appointment of Mary E. Jackson as the product manager for AGent Resource Sharing. Jackson has established a reputation as one of the top experts in the world on interlibrary loan (ILL) and resource-sharing issues. Prior to joining Auto-Graphics, Jackson worked for the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) in a variety of roles and projects, including the North American Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery (NAILDD) Project and the ILL Protocol Implementers Group.

Recent assignments for Jackson at ARL included serving as LibQUAL+ Service Manager and as the Director of Collections and Access Programs. Jackson has published more than 100 publications on topics related to ILL and

document delivery. Before joining ARL, Jackson managed the ILL department at the University of Pennsylvania Libraries.

Auto-Graphics, based in Pomona, California, was founded in 1950, which makes it one of the longest-standing companies in the industry. During its earliest days, the company offered services related to the publishing industry but has been involved in library services for more than thirty-five years now. The company's key library products include the AGent family of products, including AGent Resource Sharing interlibrary loan, AGent Search federated search utility, and the AGent VERSO integrated library system. ■

More info. @:

www4.auto-graphics.com

Francisco Partners Completes Ex Libris Buy

The only major industry news on the mergers-and-acquisitions front involves the completion of the acquisition of Ex Libris by Francisco Partners, which was announced last month (November 1, 2006). The closing of the transaction took a bit longer than the projected September 2006 date, but given the international complexities involved, this minor delay is not surprising. Terms of the transaction were not disclosed, and Ex Libris will continue to operate under its existing management and business plan. ■

Mass Digitization Projects

Pick Up Participants and Steam

Google, Microsoft, and other mass digitization projects seem to be wooing library directors of members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) as if they were Coke and Pepsi distributors seeking exclusive campus distribution rights.

As briefly mentioned in the November issue of *SLN* (“Google Infiltrates Wisconsin, Spain, India, and News Archives”), the University of Wisconsin-Madison announced it has joined the Google mass digitization project. UW-Madison’s participation will concentrate on public domain and historical books and documents, which will include material from the Wisconsin Historical Society Library. Those at UW-Madison seem particularly keen to actively explore how this massive digitization project can advance and improve K–16 formal education.

Also in October, Cornell University announced a partnership with Microsoft to add its public domain books to Microsoft’s Live Book Search Service. Kirtas Technologies will provide the scanning systems, which can ingest content at the rate of up to 2,400 pages per hour. Like Wisconsin, Cornell will scan only books and related items in the public domain.

According to Cornell’s press release, “Microsoft will give the Library high-quality digital images of all the materials, allowing the Library to provide worldwide access through its own digital library and to share the content with non-commercial academic initiatives and non-profit organizations.”

The kid gloves are off now. It’s a slugfest. Within a short time, perhaps prospective college students will add the following basic question to their list of

things to ask during their campus visits: “Is this a Google campus or a Microsoft campus?” —*Tom Peters*

More Info. @:

“UW-Madison Joins Massive Google Book Project,” www.news.wisc.edu/13010.html

“Cornell University Library Announces Partnership with Microsoft that Will Allow Global Access to Its World-Class Resources,” www.news.cornell.edu/pressoffice1/Oct06/library_microsoft.shtml



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December 2006 Tom Peters Explores Second Life Library Services

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

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

Tom Peters
816-228-6406
tpeters@tapinformation.com

Editor
Teresa Koltzenburg
800-545-2433, ext. 3252
312-280-3252
tkoltzenburg@ala.org

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

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