



Smart Libraries

Formerly Library Systems Newsletter™

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

July 2006 Volume XXVI Number 7

The Technology of Reading

The mission of most libraries involves fostering reading. As the slogan says, “Reading is fundamental”—to the advancement and self-actualization of the individual, society, culture, and the nation. Without the adoption and diffusion of reading throughout advancing societies over the course of recent centuries, libraries would not have attained the success and cultural capital they currently enjoy. Reading and libraries are yoked.

The future of reading, however, is cloudy, which in turn contributes to a sense that libraries are increasingly at risk. The *Reading at Risk* report, issued by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in June 2004, reported that literary reading is declining in America across all the major demographic groups. The results of the survey, conducted in 2002, of 17,000 adults are compared with the results of similar surveys conducted in 1982 and 1992. Women engage in literary reading more than men, but reading done by both sexes is decreasing. Whites tend to engage in literary reading more often than African Americans and Hispanics, but reading among all three of the major racial/ethnic groups is in decline.

Generally, the higher the formal-educational attainment, the more likely a person is to engage in literary reading; but reading among college graduates declined 15.4 percentage points between 1982 and 2002, the same decline as for citizens with only some high school education. All seven age-group breakdowns of the adult population experienced declines in literary reading, but the 17 percentage point drop between 1982 and 2002 among adults between the ages of 18–24 was the most precipitous.

The Literary Twilight?

The executive summary of the report notes, “Literature reading is fading as a meaningful activity, especially among younger people. If one believes that active and engaged readers lead richer intellectual lives than non-readers and that a well-read citizenry is essential to a vibrant democracy, the decline of literary reading calls for serious action.”

Unfortunately, the NEA report took a rather narrow view of reading—synonymous with “print culture”—and seemed to portray technology in general and electronic media in particular as part of the problem, not part of the solution.

This passage from NEA chair Dana Gioia’s preface to the report draws the battle lines: “While oral culture has a rich immediacy that is not to be dismissed, and electronic media offer the considerable advantages of diversity and access,

Continued on next page

IN THIS ISSUE

The Technology of Reading
PAGE 1

The ILS Scoop by Marshall Breeding

Big Bibliographic Services: OCLC & RLG
PAGE 4

Innovative to Introduce Encore
PAGE 6

**Whither or Wither?—
The Public Access Catalog**
PAGE 7

Google Metaverse
PAGE 7



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.

ISSN 1541-8820

print culture affords irreplaceable forms of focused attention and contemplation that make complex communications and insights possible. To lose such intellectual capability—and the many sorts of human continuity it allows—would constitute a vast cultural impoverishment.”

A Plot Twist

If we adopt a more inclusive view of reading, which encompasses not only printed alphanumeric material (hard cover, paperback, large print, etc.), that can be read via sight, but also printed matter such as Braille (that is read by touching) as well as audiobooks (both analog and digital)—which are read via listening—and throw in electronic books, we have a richer picture of the potential future of reading. Vision, hearing, and touch all play roles in this broader sense of reading.

I don't want to ignore the olfactory aspects of certain types of reading, but if I read one more appeal from the defenders of traditional print culture about the pleasures of the smell of a book, I am going to scream. As far as I know, the fifth sense, taste (literal taste, that is, not the taste of high culture and refined sensibilities) plays no part in reading no matter how broadly we define reading—but I may be wrong.

The dirty little secret about reading is that—while it certainly involves profound sensory, cognitive, and emotional skills on the part of the reader—all forms of reading require technology to make them possible. The technologies behind printing and binding, transportation, lighting, and even furniture design make the beloved “print culture” form of reading—a good, well-made book, a good light source, and an easy chair—as heavily dependent on technology as the more “radical” forms of reading via e-books and digital audiobooks.

Electronic media promise not only the increased diversity and better access that Mr. Gioia noted in his preface to the *Reading at Risk* report, but also improved methods for focusing and sustaining one's attention, deepening and expanding the reader's powers of contemplation, and the complexity of communication and insights capable of being conveyed from one person to another via the magical process of reading.

The Other Story

So, if technology is going to be part of the solution of the goal of a vibrant future for reading and libraries, what has technology done for reading lately?

For starters, reader software, which is used to interact with electronic books and has been moribund for several years, is showing signs of life and progress. In April, OSOFT announced that version 2.0 of its ThoutReader software, which has been renamed *dotReader*, will be released in August 2006. It will be the first commercial-reader software program capable of displaying ebooks in the OpenReader format. Eventually, this

could help topple the “Tower of eBabel” e-book incompatibilities about which David Rothman of the Teleread blog so eloquently laments.

Amazon also has released an Online-Reader software program to be used for digitized books with Amazon's “search inside the book” feature enabled. If the online purchaser of a physical book elects for the Amazon Upgrade (usually about five bucks more than the print price), the purchaser can start reading and interacting with the book online while waiting for the physical “print culture” object to arrive. The reader is able to highlight, bookmark, annotate, or tag any page or section of the text. The reader also can print and copy and paste selections. The slogan for the Amazon Upgrade may become *digitize me*, rather than *supersize me*.

It is a little disconcerting, however, to think the printed book, winging its way to the reader via the fossil fuel-delivery system, is somehow privileged above all other formats.

Although literary reading overall may be in a steady, widespread decline in America, book-discussion groups seem to be flourishing. Technology can aid



and abet group discussions about literary works too. Some book-discussion groups are using Web-conferencing systems to conduct their real-time interactions either entirely online or through a combination of live in-person and live, online interactions. Libraries in virtual-reality environments, such as the Second Life Library, also are conducting “in-world” book discussions. The promise here is to help birds of a feather congregate, no matter where they are roosting in the real world.

Although legions of MP3-toting and -touting Americans may not be exactly what Walter Ong and other theorists had in mind back in the heyday of literary reading when they envisioned a return to oral culture, the purists’ argument—that only reading done with eyes focused on ink squeezed onto paper is true reading—no longer rings true. Many blind citizens are avid readers and very literate and articulate, but because Braille is in a steep decline as a form of written communication, they now rely heavily on listening to books from various sources, including libraries.

Converging Content

Listening to a book is a different experience than visually reading it. The ear cannot quickly glance back or forward as it makes perceptual sense of the text—unless the audio-reader software facilitates it. Nevertheless, the ability to be immersed in an audiobook-listening experience, one in which complex ideas and subtle forms of human communication are conveyed, is increasingly realizable through downloadable-digital audiobooks.

For example, I just finished listening to a digital audiobook version of *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac, read by the actor Matt Dillon. (Matt, my man, keep your day job.) Although I cannot control other variables (such as the passage of twenty-five years since I first read the book visually via a printed paperback), I can report that listening to the digital audiobook version on a portable MP3 player was a worthwhile, immersing listening experience, which brought out in me new senses of meaning and appreciation of this novel.

Admittedly, technology does present some threats to reading. For example, if portable-media players soon become as popular as portable MP3 players currently are, “mere” e-books and digital audiobooks—which may soon converge into one experience—will need to compete for time and attention on the same device the user utilizes for movies, music, music videos, television series, games, video podcasts, and other highly polished interactive media objects.

A Bigger Little Picture

Not willing to serve simply as the bearer of bad news, the NEA is trying to do something about the accelerating decline of literary reading in American life. NEA, collaborating with Arts Midwest and the Institute of Museum and Library Services, launched the *Big Read* initiative “...to revitalize the role of literature in the nation’s popular culture, and to bring the transformative power of literature into the lives of its citizens.”

Currently there are ten participating communities, including several spearheaded by public libraries.

In 2007, NEA plans to award 100 Big Read grants to community-based partnerships of libraries, schools, governmental bodies, and other cultural institutions to plan and host series of book discussions about several seminal American books. Let’s hope that libraries take the lead on these big reads.

Again, unfortunately, the NEA’s Big Read Web site contains nary a mention of how computer hardware, software, and networks could be utilized to extend the reach of Big Read events. An online or combination online/in-person author discussion or panel of experts could reach more people and more communities, not only live but via digital recorded, archived, and podcast programs.

If reading is to survive and thrive, what we need are millions and millions of little reads recurring over the years, decades, and generations. If a hundred big reads centered around four classic American novels can move us back toward that goal, they will be useful.—*Tom Peters*

More info. @: “Literary Reading in Dramatic Decline, According to National Endowment for the Arts Survey,” www.nea.gov/news/news04/ReadingAtRisk.html

NEA’s The Big Read, www.neabigread.org

“dotReader is new name for OSoft’s ThoutReader: Honors Legendary Columnist Dorothy Thompson, Who Warned against Hitler,” www.teleread.org/blog/?p=4855n
www.dotreader.com

THE ILS SCOOP BY MARSHALL BREEDING

Big Bibliographic Services: OCLC & RLG



OCLC has been on a buying spree of library-automation companies in recent months (see *SLN* 26:2, February 2006, "OCLC's Open Season on Acquisitions," p. 1). So on May 3, 2006, it wasn't surprising news when RLG, a smaller-scale organization that offered an alternative set of bibliographic databases and services for research libraries, announced it would be joining the OCLC brood. Although cast as a merger, the terms of the arrangement spell out an acquisition.

According to the jointly issued FAQ, the transaction involves OCLC purchasing the assets and assuming the liabilities of RLG. If the deal completes, RLG will no longer exist as a separate organization. The plan calls for OCLC to integrate RLG's products and services in two ways: some will be combined with existing OCLC products and services to create economies of scale and to eliminate redundancies, while others will continue within OCLC and be managed through a new *RLG-Programs* division. OCLC will retain RLG's Mountain View, California, facilities, but will close its two-person office in New York.

The OCLC Board of Trustees and the RLG Board of Directors have approved the acquisition, which will take effect July 1, 2006, pending the approval of RLG's member institutions. To go for-

ward, two-thirds of RLG members must vote in favor of combining with OCLC.

The New Addition

RLG, originally known as the Research Libraries Group, was formed in 1974 by the libraries of Columbia University, Harvard University, Yale University, and the New York Public Library. Today its membership totals 150 and includes research libraries, archives, and museums. The Mountain View-based organization employs 80 staff members. (In comparison, OCLC was founded in 1967, provides services to 54,000 libraries, and employs 1,250.)

Though RLG may be small in size relative to OCLC, its assets are not insignificant. The RLG Union Catalog currently contains 48-million records with more than 400 languages represented. WorldCat currently stands at 69-million records.

RLG offers interlibrary-loan services, subscription access to article-level research databases, ArchiveGrid (a resource describing primary sources held in 2,500 libraries, archives, and museums), CAMIO (a catalog of art images), and a variety of other products and services to its members.

Preliminary plans have been announced that explain how RLG will

...merging the two union catalogs into one will be a complex process but will result in an even more expansive universe of bibliographic information.

fit within the OCLC organization. When the deal is completed, RLG's president James Michalko will become VP of RLG-Programs Development within OCLC, reporting to Lorcan Dempsey, VP of research and OCLC chief strategist.

Current RLG members will become partners of the RLG-Programs unit of OCLC, and will continue to pay dues in support of its activities. At least initially, partnership in RLG-Programs does not constitute membership in OCLC. Current RLG members that are not also OCLC members will need to decide if they want to join OCLC.

Coming, Going, and Growing

Several of RLG's products and services will be combined into the appropriate OCLC offerings. Both organizations maintain union catalogs of bibliographic records. The RLG Union Catalog will be merged into WorldCat. These two systems follow different models for organizing their records—OCLC aims to have a single record for each bibliographic entity, while RLG retains multiple versions of records. Given these differences, merging the two union catalogs into one will be a complex process but will result in an even more expansive universe of bibliographic information.

RLG saw a very positive response to RedLightGreen, a search interface that provides access to the RLG Union Catalog that's designed for undergraduate students and made freely available on the Web. RedLightGreen, developed with the support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and launched in September 2003, brings many of the current-generation Web technologies, such as the simple search box, faceted searching, relevance ranking, and many other features that have gained wide acceptance

on commercial Web sites and that have recently begun to take hold in library-provided services.

Since the RLG Union Catalog will be phased out once it is merged into WorldCat, RedLightGreen, as an interface for searching this resource, will likewise fade away, though its concepts and features will be incorporated into WorldCat.

The incorporation of RLG into OCLC brings about another round of consolidation of bibliographic utilities in the U.S. In the 1980s and 1990s, three major bibliographic networks prevailed in the U.S.: OCLC, WLN, and RLG. WLN, the bibliographic services organization serving 550 libraries in the northwestern region of the U.S. and Canada, merged with OCLC in November 1998.

This recent move leaves OCLC in a very dominant position. While some commercial vendors (such as AutoGraphics and The Library Corporation) offer subscription access to bibliographic and authority databases, OCLC remains as the last standing non-profit membership organization for bibliographic services to libraries.

OCLC and RLG have long had similar organizational missions and offer overlapping services. The organizational demise of RLG will represent a loss for many of its member libraries that rely on its specialized services. Yet the larger library community may benefit from the incorporation of RLG-developed services, programs, and technologies into OCLC's offerings, especially those with worldwide impact.

Today, libraries face an onslaught of challenges from the Internet search engines and other commercial Web-based services. Those of us who work in libraries struggle to keep our institutions—as well as our individual skills and services—relevant to library users. The consolidation of library resources under the OCLC umbrella may prove to be necessary to help libraries weather the storm of commercial competition. ■

More Info. @: "RLG to Combine with OCLC," www.rlg.org/en/page.php?Page_ID=20942
"RLG + OCLC = ?" by Jessamyn West, at Librarian.net, www.librarian.net/stax/1735



THE ILS SCOOP

Innovative to Introduce Encore

Vendor reports Encore 'discovery services platform' will leverage Web 2.0 technologies and Millennium integration.

Users' expectations for finding information on the Web have changed dramatically in the last few years. Internet search engines, social-networking sites, online shopping and auction sites, and commercial-information services have all invested tremendous resources into developing technologies and interfaces for finding information among enormous bodies of content.

The approach that prevails in libraries for providing access to resources falls out of step with these current expectations. Libraries ask their users to search the library catalog for print materials, pick through A–Z lists of electronic journals, and search various databases of journal articles. Each of these interfaces can be complex, and users may have to deal with several of them to find what they need in the library's collection.

In response to this set of rising expectations—versus the fractured approach present in the current generation of library interfaces—a number of alternative and next-generation interfaces have emerged. In previous issues of *SLN*, I have covered alternative library-catalog interfaces—like that of the AquaBrowser Library by MediaLab Solutions (*SLN*, 25:10, p. 2) as well as Primo, Ex Libris's

next-generation information-discovery and -delivery tool (*SLN*, 26:3, p. 1). It's clear that the competition is heating up to deliver technologies that help libraries keep pace with the expectations of their increasingly Web-savvy clientele.

Staging More

Innovative Interfaces announced it's developing *Encore*, a next-generation library interface, or *discovery services platform*, which is designed to provide a more unified approach to finding information resources.

Encore leverages the Millennium ILS and many of the other technologies that Innovative Interfaces has developed over recent years to create a search platform that encompasses all the library's resources. This new product will draw on the federated search, authentication, relevancy, and link-resolution technologies already integrated into Millennium.

Today, library users search the Millennium WebPAC for items held by the library, and search the electronic resources to which the library subscribes separately. MetaFind, Innovative's federated-search interface, at least makes it possible to search multiple electronic-resource products simultaneously.

The next step in the evolution of library interfaces involves providing a discovery tool that consolidates these separate steps currently involved when searching library resources. Through *Encore*, Millennium is extended to become the platform for discovery throughout all the library's collections, both print and electronic.

Encore supplements the library's existing catalog data by drawing metadata and search services from remote resources into Millennium to constitute

a consolidated search platform. This approach contrasts with AquaBrowser, Endeca Guided Search, and Primo, which each export library-catalog data into an external-search platform. *Encore* allows the library's catalog data to remain in place, avoiding the overhead involved in keeping an external search platform up-to-date and developing linkages back into the ILS for delivering patron services.

The first phase of *Encore* development will include the presentation of results from the local catalog, federated search and link resolver, faceted searching, and relevancy ranking using Innovative's own *Right Results* technology. *Encore* will take advantage of AJAX (Asynchronous JavaScript and XML) to deliver a more intuitive and dynamic user interface, and it will include social-networking concepts such as community tagging.

Development of *Encore* is underway with the release of an initial version expected mid-year in 2007. ■

More Info. @: "Innovative Announces *Encore*: New Discovery Services Platform Leverages Web 2.0 Technologies and Millennium Integration," www.iii.com/news/pr_template.php?id=290



Whither or Wither?—The Public Access Catalog

The debate about the future of the library public-access catalog continues to generate not only words, but also action and experimentation. This spring, the River Campus Libraries of the University of Rochester announced receipt of a \$283,000 grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to do some planning and analysis for an eXtensible Catalog, an open-source system that will provide intellectual access to library materials of all types.

In addition to a thorough environmental scan and the development of recommendations, this project may result in a collaborative effort by like-minded academic libraries to create, from all the available parts and tools, an open-source public access catalog (OSPAC). Evidently, the results of a comprehensive search will be clusters and categorized in ways that are useful to academic library users.

Panel discussions at professional meetings also continue in earnest. For example, at the Annual Conference of the Ameri-

can Library Association in late June, Andrew “OPACs suck” Pace and John Blyberg from the Ann Arbor District Library were joined by others in a thoughtful discussion about how the OPAC of the future can better meet user needs, expectations, and preferences.—*Tom Peters*

More Info. @: “Mellon Grant Funds Planning Analysis for Future Online Services,” www.rochester.edu/news/show.php?id=2518

Karen G. Schneider’s “How OPACs Suck” Series on the ALA TechSource Blog:

www.techsource.ala.org/blog/2006/03/how-opacs-suck-part-1-relevance-rank-or-the-lack-of-it.html

www.techsource.ala.org/blog/2006/04/how-opacs-suck-part-2-the-checklist-of-shame.html

www.techsource.ala.org/blog/2006/05/how-opacs-suck-part-3-the-big-picture.html



Google Metaverse

In what may become the ultimate mash up, Google has announced its intent to combine aspects of three-dimensional virtual-reality environments with its existing Google Earth product, which knits into a more-or-less seamless whole visual image of real Earth. In late April, Google released the free beta version (someone prescribe beta blockers, please) of SketchUp, a popular 3-D modeling software program Google recently acquired.—*Tom Peters*

More info. @: SketchUp, www.sketchup.com/



ALA TechSource
www.techsource.ala.org

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

NON PROFIT
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT 3020
BIRMINGHAM, AL

July 2006 In The **ILS** Scoop: A Bibliographic Behemoth? RLG Joins OCLC

Smart Libraries Newsletter

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

TO SUBSCRIBE

To reserve your subscription, contact the Customer Service Center at 800-545-2433, press 5 for assistance, or visit www.techsource.ala.org.

The 2006 subscription price is just \$85 US.

Production and design by Angela Gwizdala,
American Library Association Production Services.

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

Copyright American Library Association 2006. All rights reserved.