

ALA Annual Conference - July 9-15, 2009
McCormick Place - Chicago, Illinois
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The Secret Life of Our Data: Privacy in the Digital Age

Andy Dale of OCLC spoke about the various locations of “person” data in an ILS and all of the potential hazards in regards to privacy, even with FERPA regulations. The two problem areas are obvious, ILL and circulation, especially in a shared circulation system. There are 7 “laws” of identity in systems: user control/consent, minimal disclosure, justifiable parties, directed identity, pluralism, human integration, consistent experience. Andy “graded” libraries on each law and found that we had a “C average” when it came to protecting patron information. Overall the technology (ILS) is lagging. Legacy systems do not protect privacy well and it is too hard to upgrade them to make them do better. In short, libraries pass too much information about patrons between each other, especially when they are part of a consortia (a/k/a “honey pot” of data if data is ever breached). ILS’s can offer an opportunity for “anonymization” of patron data, but libraries rarely fulfill the full potential of their ILS.

Why Tech Support IS Reference

A fast and fascinating presentation about embracing technology support at your reference desk. Although this was presented by public librarians several of the points rang true for academic libraries, the loudest being that librarians must be experts on information AND its packaging and delivery. If that means that you need to understand file extensions then so be it! We must help with “computer support” b/c it makes us relevant, it aligns with our mission to serve/support, it’s great marketing of libraries as being “helpful”, and it allows for staff development. Refusing to support a computer issue makes you look irrelevant and unhelpful. At the end of the day patrons need HELP. They shouldn’t have to differentiate WHAT help they need from WHO. Competencies to focus on when cross training library and technology/help desk staff are: attitude, PC basics, data management, web page fundamentals, internet sources, effective use of search engines, understanding of your ILS matrix and policies.

Telecommunications: Connecting in the 21st Century

Members of ALA’s OITP discussed the results of data compiled in 2007. Statistics found that only 3/4 of public libraries offer wireless and most had internal systems on the same network as public patrons. This vastly affected work b/c performance issues affected both staff and patrons. It was discussed that the issue is no longer internet access itself as much as the quality of that access (speed, download/upload, stability, etc). The big question was “What is sufficient bandwidth for a public library?” The answer: “When you click on something it works.” The need for bandwidth will continue to grow. Cost and availability will continue to be the key factors to watch. Discussion then turned to broadband funding and the “American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA).

Libraries and Mobile Devices: Public Policy Considerations

This was a great session discussing the impact of mobile devices on the population and addressing how the “policies” that are needed for mobile devices are not new. Libraries have the same concerns providing for mobile devices that they have always had: copyright law, licensing, privacy and accessibility. The most interesting and impactful part of this presentation was the opening speaker who highlighted the “state of the mobile” statistics:

- There are 4.1 billion mobile phone subscriptions in the world
- There are 6.8 billion people on the planet. That means 60% of the world population has a mobile device.
- 2.4 billion people are using SMS/text messaging
- 1.2 billion people are using email (only ½ the number of people using SMS/txt!)
- There were 2.3 TRILLION text messages sent in 2008.
- The use of mobile devices has a 20% growth curve, the most popular device is the smart phone and it has the highest growth.
- With these numbers mobile devices are the single most popular way that the world is accessing data.

Other devices in the field are the Kindle and other “net books”. Users generally have an option of buying a device that has a web connection (Kindle) with no data plan (cost is the one time purchase fee), or a free device that comes with a monthly data plan. Another popular device is “mi-fi” a mobile cellular router that broadcasts a wireless signal from a data plan. In the next 3-5 years we will have 4G/LTE. This will have a minimum of 100 mb download and 50 mb upload speed. It is scheduled to go live in Vancouver by Feb 2010, and at&t will adopt 4G by 2011. With these speeds the adoption of mobile devices and using them as a replacement for a traditional desktop will continue to increase.

Technology doesn’t get socially exciting until it gets boring, and libraries’ problems are the same as everyone else’s’ – interoperability.

Serials Solutions CARLI Breakfast

I was so thankful Serials Solutions hosted a breakfast to talk with CARLI members about their 360 products as I had missed the web cast opportunities to learn about them while I was out on leave. Not only did I get to meet the vendors face to face and establish a relationship with them, but I also had an opportunity to ask questions specific to my concerns and meet with the product trainers. I’m very impressed and excited about the 360 ERM and counter products as well as Serials Solutions’ A to Z list that comes with them. Benedictine University is very excited about the 360 products and is moving forward with implementing them in our library.

Content Management Systems in Libraries: Opportunities and Lessons Learned

This was a great panel discussing the use of open source software by libraries. The initial speaker was Jonathan Blackburn (formerly of Florida State University). His lessons learned included:

- Start with a content management plan. In particular, WHO does WHAT, WHEN and HOW OFTEN (and how are they held accountable).
- Get staff input (identify the gaps in content, find out what your staff really wants to do).
- Get support from the administration, not just financial backing.
- Choose the right tool(s) for the job. Just b/c that tool is new/cool/awesome doesn't mean it will work well for your library.
- Be flexible and embrace workarounds
- Outsource when possible

Next, Eli Neiburger of Ann Arbor District Library discussed their use of Drupal to replace both their web site and their catalog interface. AADL pushed Drupal to its limits and is taking full advantage of its social software applications and out-of-the-box content integration. Drupal allowed them to finally achieve single sign on for their patrons as well as "easily" create and promote digital content. Since launching they have empowered everyone to create content for their web site and as a result have a very full and active web site. Check them out at <http://www.aadl.org/>.