

ICLG News

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ICLG Survey

As part of our drive to constantly improve the service we give to our members, the ICLG Management Committee have put together a survey, which elicits your views on the group as a whole and on our newsletter, the ICLG News. The survey is now available at our web site: <http://iclg.org.uk>.

One lucky member will win £50 of vouchers from Amazon.co.uk for completing the survey. So don't delay, fill in the survey today!

Note: The survey will be available on the ICLG Web site only until the end of July, after which time it will be taken off the site.

Thanks Jackie

Jackie Fishleigh has announced that she is stepping down from ICLG activities, which include her position as co-editor of the ICLG News, to concentrate on her work with BIALL (The British and Irish Association of Law Librarians).

Jackie is due to become Chair of the External Affairs Committee of BIALL and feels that she needs to devote her energies to that group at this point. All of the ICLG wish her the very best in her new position, and I must say a special thank you for all the proofreading she has done for the newsletter.

Doug

Future Librarians - Taxonomies and Metadata at the BBC

I thought I'd make an effort to go to events a bit out of the ordinary this year, things not in my usual line of work, so I decided to attend a talk by Martin Belam on metadata and taxonomies to the Association of UK Media Librarians.

I picked it from my latest ICLG email and thought it might be quite interesting, put it in my diary and forgot about it.

When the day of the talk came round, I must admit to some apprehension, I thought that maybe I was a bit of a fraud, going to a talk I didn't know much about (shady memories of lectures at university), and more importantly of course, to something where I would know no-one.

Martin's talk was entitled Future Librarians, and it was clear from the outset that his aim was to get across to us that in a world where Google indexes around 6 million web artefacts there is a clear role for these archiving and organisational skills to be applied to the web. We have hopefully moved on from seeing the Internet as a threat to the business of information, but there is still a huge way to go in organising the material on it for effective information retrieval. This is where we Future Librarians come in.

The BBC's work in this area was demonstrated through two elements of their work in making their site accessible to users.

The BBCi homepage started life quite simply, but now there are over 150 links on that page alone, and the site as a whole gets 20 million page views per week. Several reasons as to why there are so many links was given – promotional, statistical and political. So creating a taxonomy structure for the site was essential, and the BBC looked at several well-established taxonomies to fit around the BBC model. They also conducted several user studies,

primarily to analyse users' understanding of information order and structure – i.e. where they expect to find things. The BBC then and now continue to monitor the search terms used on the home page and users' site navigation in order to better assess users wants and thereby alter the content.

(They even send a regular email to BBC staff letting them know what the public are looking for to facilitate change to site content!) They also assess use of the A-Z keyword index – it was suggested that if people are using this, it indicates that they are not finding what they want through the search engine. I'm not sure I agree with this – I often use the Index for quickness if I know something is there.

The human element comes from analysing these search terms, and adding them to the taxonomy, associated with human-evaluated Internet links to relevant sites. This takes up a huge amount of time, as you can imagine – up to 5 editorial assistants can be employed on this task at any one time. As well as this, the taxonomy has to cope with synonyms and spelling errors – the BBC site is very much geared to inexperienced Internet users, and must to a certain extent pre-empt what users want. Martin demonstrated the necessarily dynamic nature of the taxonomy through the continued analysis of search results and reassessment of the links. For instance, when a news story breaks, such as the earthquake in Iran, the team have to quickly provide new links, anticipate search terms and alter the taxonomy – the term “Bam” may already be associated with completely different links. All of this information is done via human intervention – and this is what seems to be its strength.

Some interesting facts I hope Martin doesn't mind me mentioning:

- ◆ Four out of five searches on the BBC website are not about the BBC.
- ◆ One in five attempts at advanced searching fail.
- ◆ Around 70% of users expect exact results from a one or two word search string.
- ◆ The BBC gets over 200,000 unique searches every day.

- ◆ 2 in 5 searches are UK oriented, and as such the sites in the taxonomy are UK focused.

I drew a parallel here between the web taxonomy and the hard copy book index. We wouldn't attempt to give a computer the job of constructing the index to a textbook, as Martin says, they are “very good at very hard maths,” and the same is true here of web taxonomies or web indexes (forgive me if I am oversimplifying). Several familiar factors such as the ability to pay commercial search engines for results rankings and optimising the code make standard computerised methods intrinsically flawed.

The second part of the talk discussed metadata, and particularly a project co-ordinated by a BBC colleague concerned with providing regional material on the website. This is essentially a process by which authors of the material – i.e. journalists – can enter their material online, but are encouraged to tag it with suggested keyword terms. A precise set of rules exist for when terms are suggested, and a Metadata management team exists to assess and/or reclassify metadata if necessary. This project has not been launched yet, and as such any assessment of its success was not mentioned.

The success of the BBC website and its taxonomy is obvious however – a success built around the human element of categorising and classifying – two terms we librarians should be familiar with.

I came away feeling I had learnt a lot about an area I don't really get involved in and therefore the talk emphasised the importance of staying aware of developments outside my own daily sphere. It even struck a few chords – taxonomies and metadata played a large role in the development of the Knowledge Management system at my firm.

It also encouraged me to go out on a limb and attend the odd event I wouldn't normally (I did know some people after all).

My thanks to Martin and AUKML for a truly informative and interesting talk. His notes can be found at his website www.currybet.net

Ann Coleman

Assistant Librarian, Richards Butler Law Firm

Book Review:

E-Serials collection management: transitions, trends and technicalities. Edited by David C. Fowler. Haworth Information Press, New York. 2004. US\$59.95

This is a collection of studies and experiences, with each chapter authored by different US academic librarians. This already puts the book in an unfavourable light for the membership of ICLG who will be reading this review. There are a few chapters where the issues facing the information professional are relevant regardless of geographic location or information sector, but they are not in the majority. There are references to UK studies but elsewhere the lists of key publishers, surveys of institutions and so forth lose their value to a commercial audience in the UK. Some studies, for example in chapter 1 which explores the way US academic institutions catalogue their e-journals has some gems but they are hard to find amongst the very academic focus of the piece. The different styles from different contributors also makes this book feel more like a special edition of a journal rather than a book.

The more relevant chapters for the readership of ICLG News would include the general introduction by Paul Harwood and Carolyn Alderson.

This chapter explores licence issues, problems for agents, pricing models and access. It contains a lot of what anyone doing the job for a few months would already know were issues, but to be fair you would expect that from an opening chapter.

Other chapters include:

- Chapter 2: Whether or not to use a subscription agent
- Chapter 3: Collection development (which states that corporate, medical and other special libraries were excluded from the various surveys);
- Chapter 4: 'IP ranges versus passwords'; one of the more successful topics when it came to crossing the sector gap

- Chapter 5: on Consortia, focusing on collaborations between academic institutions
- Chapter 6: Usage data and its collection and standardisation
- Chapters 7,8,10,12 & 13 which were case studies
- Chapter 9: The e-book; is out of place in a collection of articles/chapters about e-journals
- Chapter 11: Regional accreditation; which seems a process specific to US academic institutions

I so wanted to find some answers to the thorny questions that e-journals pose, but sadly those questions remain unanswered following the reading of this book.

Fiona Durrant

**Library & Information Centre Manager
Baker & McKenzie**

Being an Anomaly: Male Librarians

I know what it's like to be the only woman in male-dominated organizations — uncomfortable! — so I always wondered what it was like for men to work in female-dominated professions like librarianship.

A while back, I asked my male readers about their experiences, and several of you responded. I also read a survey of male librarians in the March, 1994 *American Libraries*, and a book by Christine Williams, *Still a Man's World: Men Who Do Women's Work*. Between these, I think I've gotten some sense of the pleasures and awkwardnesses of this situation.

The biggest culture clash may lie in performance expectations. Several men said they felt they were more willing than women to make sacrifices for career advancement. What they demanded of themselves and those they supervised was achievement, excellence, competitiveness, enterprise, and hard work, and there was some resentment of women who fell short. One man quoted in *American Libraries* snorted,

“There is an increasing sense that women can underachieve But this is supposed to be glossed over because they (women) are more ‘nurturing,’ ‘supportive,’ ‘sensitive.’” Another man quoted in the article complained that “[women’s] actual output is ignored in favor of their value as ‘role models.’” One of my readers complained about women who return to library jobs after time off for family responsibilities but haven’t bothered to retrain themselves for a world where OPACs have replaced card catalogs.

Those may be sweeping generalizations, but if there’s a kernel of truth there, it should make for an interesting time come the annual performance evaluation. One library director, who was a truckdriver in his youth, was a little daunted the first time an employee cried when he criticized her work. He says, “supervising women has called for much more sensitivity to feelings than I ever needed supervising men. You can’t really swear at women.” Another reader noted that when he had to criticize men’s performance, they didn’t take it personally, but women nursed their resentment about performance critiques for a long time.

Christine Williams found a widespread expectation that men would naturally want advancement to administrative positions; she noted that whereas women were sometimes confronted by a “glass ceiling,” men seemed to have a “glass escalator.” Interestingly, this occurred regardless of whether the men wanted administrative jobs or not; one man who enjoyed his work as a children’s librarian was downgraded for “not shooting high enough.” Yes, they said, he was an excellent storyteller, and the children liked him, but “I wasn’t doing the management-oriented work that they thought I should be doing.”

A number of men resented being on the wrong side of a double standard. They didn’t like women expecting them to do the heavy lifting jobs, deal with problem patrons, and work late night shifts (because personal safety wasn’t supposed to be an issue for them). They didn’t appreciate conversations in which female colleagues made dismissive comments about the entire male gender, and told them that, being men, of course they “didn’t get it” — especially since they knew that if they made similar criticisms of women they could

be nailed for sexual harassment.

There’s an up side to the anomalous position of men in this women’s world, though, including love of the work itself. One man, who fell into the job of children’s librarian, found that “I liked the work, and had a gift for storytelling and sharing.” The fact that they get to deal with books and ideas, and patrons and colleagues who care about them, is clearly one of the most rewarding aspects of the job. Other men commented on the pace of the work — one said he enjoyed working with women because “men are too territorial and competitive.”

For one library director I spoke with, one of the great pleasures of working with women was that “it’s easier to talk to women about the truly important things in life, family being one,” and he didn’t have to pretend to care about sports. (He tells about being at a professional conference while the NCAA tournament was going on. A male colleague, noticing he was from Iowa, started talking enthusiastically about the Iowa Hawkeyes’ performance in the playoffs. Our hero, who didn’t know or care that Iowa was IN the playoffs, was rescued by a female colleague who proceeded to talk basketball with the man for an hour.)

So, I now know a little more than I did before about being a minority. I realize that I’m as likely to make gender assumptions as men are, but less likely to be held accountable for them. Men have had to retrain themselves, learn to refrain from the kinds of sexual and sexist comments and jokes they might have made around other men, and learn to limit what they say and do to that which is legal and inoffensive. It sounds like now it’s time for women to monitor our own assumptions, comments, and behavior in the same way.

From Ex Libris: an E-Zine for Librarians and Other Information Junkies.

<http://marylaine.com/exlibris/>

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