

ILS Futures Forum

Como Conservatory - November 10th, 2006
(Iris' notes)

Summary of Roy Tennant's Talk:

The Current Situation:

Saying that he wouldn't "point and laugh" at other people's catalogs, Tennant used his own catalog and that of the UC system as examples of the current strengths and weaknesses of catalogs. He also pointed out that he's "never let ignorance stand in the way of an opinion."

- The Online Public Access Catalog developed as an extension of "back room" functions in the library. We automated circulation procedures, then cataloging, then acquisitions. Then we decided that as long as we had all this information, we might as well let the public see it. Thus was the OPAC born. This system was optimized for librarians, not users.
- The catalog is currently optimized for inventory control.
- It is good for known item searching.
- It forces users to make decisions (such as choosing which index to search) before executing a search, and it provides little assistance to help users refine their executed searches.
- Key problems:
 - We've conflated management and discovery
 - We've created systems that don't talk to other systems ("stovepipe systems")
 - We've been asking our vendors for the wrong things (instead of asking for tweaks, ask for overhaul and refocusing on end-user needs)
 - We should collaborate regionally and nationally

Envisioning the Future:

Tennant was very clear that we need not change simply to look more like modern web applications. In fact, we needn't change simply because "users are used to" specific features and functions. Rather, we need to change so that this system we provide actually functions as a discovery tool for end users rather than as an extension of a collection management tool for librarians.

- Split the collection management system from the discovery system.
- Never buy a system that doesn't come with an API (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/API>). Systems will become modular, knitted together by APIs (and therefore common standards).
- Users are accustomed to bibliographic searching in the form of Amazon searching. But even more than that, Amazon does a better job of interpreting "stupid" searches and of suggesting courses of action to users who may not have found what they wanted.

- Offer the option of a single, simple search box. Harness the power of computers to interpret these searches effectively and return results in a way that will help users to make good decisions and refine their searches.
- Allow direct links to online resources, and don't bury these links in the system. Make them apparent and intuitive.
- Build in associated services to the catalog:
 - Tagging
 - Commenting
 - Reviewing
 - Rating
 - Reader's advisory
 - Add to del.icio.us
 - Email this
 - Chat with a librarian
- Display results in a way that helps users make decisions
 - FRBRize results to "gradually reveal complexity" as needed
 - Faceted browsing allows users to refine searches intelligently
 - Relevance ranking reveals useful results
 - Recommend items, terms, search options, and provide contextual help
 - Optimize the system based on user behavior (allow an "opt in" option for people who want their searches and behaviors recorded)
- The catalog is only one tool among many. Design it so that items are discoverable from other places (federated search, search engines, etc.).
- Make the discovery system about more than just books. The "back end" side should concentrate on what we have paid for, but the "front end" should allow discovery of all sorts of things (articles, books, and web sites).
- When our collection fails the user, we should have some way of "breaking down the walls" and showing what's available outside of our collection. Imagine using Open WorldCat as your home library. The default would be to show what's available here and now, but with the option to open up the search with a click of the mouse.
- Provide options (what's available now, what's available in 1-3 days, what's available in a week or more, what's available for purchase if you can't wait).
- Explore delivery options:
 - Have students buy books rather than borrow (at a discount), and then give the books back to the library when they're done.
- Explore new acquisitions options:
 - Buy
 - Lease
 - Aggregate (example of Calisphere, aggregating California images for a K-12 audience: <http://www.calisphere.universityofcalifornia.edu/>)
 - Point people toward other resources (especially the mass digitization projects such as the Google Book project and the Open Content Alliance project).

Primary Predictions:

- For the ILS
 - disintegrated systems (Andrew Pace)
 - Refocus on "back room" operations
 - to "play well with others" (APIs etc)
- For the Catalog
 - Must be interoperable!
 - Should function well alone but recognize it's position in the larger scope of available information (remember, the catalog of the future will feed end user discovery tools as well as be a discovery tool in its own right)
 - Will not be our most important finding tool
- For Discovery Systems
 - More tailored to user needs
 - Incorporate access to a lot of stuff, including what we don't own
 - Interact with other services/applications
 - May not be managed by us
 - Effective at connecting people with the actual information they're seeking

Examples:

Throughout his talk, Tennant provided examples that illustrated each of his points. I collected as many of these examples as possible.

- UC System: <http://melvyl.cdlib.org/>
 - Links to free, online resources buried many clicks into each record
- Pathfinder Catalog, UC-Berkeley: <http://pathfinder.berkeley.edu/>
 - 51 indexes to choose from to do a basic search
- Library Thing: <http://www.librarything.com/>
 - Tennant's comment: "This is copy cataloging at its best: click on the book and you're done."
 - Many associated services built into the user experience
- Open WorldCat: <http://worldcat.org/>
 - Revolutionary ranking algorithms (they have access to a lot of aggregate data, including holdings information)
 - Faceted searching
 - User participation
 - FRBRized results
- Koha: <http://www.koha.org/>
 - Open source ILS (can be hosted off-site)
 - Relevance ranking
 - Flexible search options
 - Reviews
 - "Virtual shelves" (such as Oprah books)
- Evergreen (ILS developed by public libraries in Georgia: PINES): <http://gapines.org/opac/en-US/skin/default/xml/index.xml>
 - Faceted browsing
 - Place holds from result lists

- NCSU Library catalog (<http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/catalog/>)
 - Places a search engine on top of the traditional vendor ILS
 - Faceting
 - Browsing
- ExLibris' Primo (Demo of "Needle Library, Haystack College" doesn't seem to be available online): <http://www.exlibrisgroup.com/primo.htm>
 - Unique in that it queries it's own database, but also sends out and processes queries to other databases as well.
 - Faceted searching
 - FRBRized result lists
 - Tagging
 - Article-level results
- MetalLib: <http://www.exlibrisgroup.com/metalib.htm>
 - Adds in options for delivery time.
 - Queries openURL link resolver BEFORE displaying the search so that if full text is available there's a link directly to the full text from the result list.
 - Find relevant databases and list them to allow direct searching.
- PennTags: <http://tags.library.upenn.edu/>
 - Students can tag bookmarks, journal articles, and catalog records (they develop bibliographies this way)
- OCLC Audience Level: <http://www.oclc.org/research/researchworks/audience/>
 - Uses library holdings data to figure out what type of audience each work fits best (school library, public library, academic library, high-level research library, etc.) [Note from Iris: I use this plug-in to quickly scan the level of books in Amazon.]

If you are interested to the questions asked during the hour-long question and answer session, just ask.