

Re-defining the library

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Abstract

Purpose: Originally the keynote speech to the Bielefeld Conference exploring the challenges facing libraries in the digital age and considering ways in which they need to reshape and rethink their services and skills to maintain their relevance and contribution.

Design/methodology/approach: A review of a wide range of recently published materials (2003 – 2006) gives a broad perspective on the challenges facing libraries. These are then considered within the case study experience of the British Library to identify key themes for redefining the concept of 'library'.

Findings: Gives a clear articulation of the challenges facing libraries. Through the case study the author identifies seven themes as central to redefining the library in the 21st century: 1. Know your users and keep close to them; 2. Re-think the physical spaces and create a desirable draw; 3. Integrate marketing into the organisation; 4. Open up legacy print collections to digital channels and through digitisation; 5. Reduce legacy costs and continue to improve productivity in traditional activities; 6. Invest more in innovation and digital activities; 7. Develop our people and ensure the right mix of skills.

Practical implications: A practical source of ideas for those seeking to develop their own library activities and a thought-provoking analysis for anyone interested in the implications of the digital age.

Originality/value: This paper gives an original view of changes within the library sector from one of the leaders in the field and is rooted in the practical and innovative approaches adopted by one of the world's great research libraries.

Keywords: Libraries, Change management, Strategic management

Paper type: Conceptual paper

I am delighted and honoured to be giving the keynote speech at this important and prestigious conference of experts. Thank you for the invitation. There is one advantage of giving a keynote speech, namely that no-one has already covered what you are about to say (as so frequently happens when you are later on the programme) and it is the prerogative of the keynote speaker to ask more questions than to give answers! I'm sure that I will be doing just that, for the theme of the conference – re-defining, re-thinking, developing new paradigms for library and information services in the 21st century – is fundamental to all of us and to the future health of scholarship and research in all our countries and in our institutions and for those we serve. This is a formidable leadership responsibility.

On a less serious note I have also decided to spare you a power-point presentation. I'm sure there will be plenty of those to come: indeed it is my normally preferred style but I think that a keynote speech should be just that!

Flavour of the challenges

When I was starting to prepare for this paper – blank screen in front of me, several cups of coffee drunk and all possible displacement activities completed – I happened to receive the January 2006 copy of *Information World Review* (2006)

through the post at home. I needed to look no further than scanning the topics of the first few pages to indicate a flavour of the challenges we face. Let me share a few with you:

- the accuracy of Wikipedia articles on science is validated by Nature. The error level is not significantly greater than levels in Encyclopaedia Britannica;
- libraries are urged to embrace the second generation of Internet technology Web 2.0 to satisfy user demands, saying that existing library catalogue standards, such as MARC and Z39.50 need to be replaced by XML technology, enabling access to information from a wide variety of web services; library catalogues are compared unfavourably to Amazon and Google search services;
- the now rather done to death topic of open access is covered with a suggestion of a split between Science, Technology and Medicine publishers, Oxford University Press, Blackwell Publishing and Springer all of whom have signed up to the Wellcome Trust Open Access model; and the Dutch (Reed Elsevier, Wolters Kluwer) and the North Americans (Wiley, Sage) who appear to be steadfastly unmoved by open access;
- Michael Gorman slams digitisation of scholarly texts as a waste of money while Elisabeth Niggemann, Director of Die Deutsche Bibliothek urges both public (European Union) and private sector investment to ensure wider access to collections; and
- Apple's flagship store in Regent Street in London is projected as a model for libraries as they reshape space and service provision to encourage knowledge exchange and solving information problems.

There is also a review of the year (Chillingworth, 2006) - *The stories that rocked your world in 2005* - and just a sample of topics is indicative of the complexity and rapidity of change within our information world over just twelve months:

In January 2005 Google announced its plans to digitise the collections of five major libraries, including the Bodleian at Oxford. Later initiatives include the Open Content Alliance (OCA) with Yahoo and Microsoft; the British Library/Microsoft agreement to digitise millions of pages; Macmillans joined the digitisation goldrush with BookStore; publishers and authors hit Google with lawsuits around copyright violation, and Amazon announced a new service to change the model to purchase book content by the page or chapter. Digitisation has never been such a hot topic! Content may really be king, at least for a little while!

But in the UK subject librarians were being threatened with redundancy at Bangor University; they were not considered as offering value for money compared with the net; and at the Science Museum the library collections were to be split up in the face of a financial crisis.

Regulatory and legislative issues pertaining to the digital environment surfaced strongly. In the UK the Freedom of Information Act came into force; in a year when terrorist bombs struck in London, terrorism was never far from the headlines with new legislation on police powers and criminal evidence and a new terrorism bill all threatening to compromise librarians and their normal business activities. And as the year ended the UK government announced a fundamental review of intellectual property in the digital environment to take place in 2006.

What does all this mean?

I have laboured these developments, to some extent a rather random sample, because they seem to me to represent either explicitly or implicitly the nature of the serious challenge to libraries and to information professionals in this first decade of the 21st century. They suggest a picture of ever more rapid innovation, mostly happening outside libraries and driven from the commercial sector; a picture of confusion and contradiction in the range of business models that are emerging and being experimented with; and of new demands from discerning and empowered users. Let me quote from David Warlock (cited in "Flashback", 2006) a well respected industry watcher who says:

[...] users are in control on the networks, and exhibit a power unparalleled in the legacy world of print [...] the gold [...] is the greater ability of users to discriminate, select, personalise and customise, as powerful players in the information industry network. (p. 32)

But such a challenge is also an exciting opportunity for the library and information sector to play new roles and to define a new future in a very fast moving and competitive environment. There is in any case no choice but to change, and change quickly if we wish to remain relevant for the future.

Challenges for the library and information sector

The challenge for libraries in the 21st century, as now only one part of a great diversity of alternatives, is to find new ways to add value and remain relevant in this rapidly changing, confusing and competitive environment. While the distant future for libraries is not clear, it is timely for libraries to challenge some historic assumptions and ask some fundamental strategic questions:

- How can we serve the needs of the digitally savvy, impatient Google generation for whom the Web – a global information commons – has primacy of place for information and knowledge seeking?
- How can we continue to enable the research and learning process when increasingly it is happening in a virtual realm outside the context of the library?
- How can we be relevant to those who have never set foot in a library – to provide the infinite connectivity to information with its stacks in the ether?
- Does the library as place have relevance and how should space be best used?
- Where should we focus in the information value chain, and what should we not do?
- How can libraries provide effective stewardship of both digital and physical collections, and what is our role regarding non-traditional information types, such as e-science data?
- How are publishing and intellectual property regimes changing, and how must we influence thinking on them and change in response?
- What types of skills do libraries need to exploit advances in technology and informatics, both to enhance knowledge exploration and presentation and to enable new ways of searching and mining their collections?
- What types of collaboration and alliances do libraries need to engage in to present coherent collections and to create innovative new products and services for content delivery?

These were some of the questions we asked ourselves at the British Library when we were formulating our new strategy in 2004/5 (The British Library, 2005). Technology is arguably turning on its head our assumptions about our value, it is challenging the roles of all accepted players; and it is enabling increasingly promiscuous users with different and higher needs to have much wider choice to fit their digital lifestyles.

Perceptions of libraries and information resources

I hope that I have made at least the outline case for major, transformational change in the library and information sector, driven from the imperatives of the external environment – the information industry, the technology and most importantly the demands of the users.

I want now to move on to some observations of how libraries are perceived by their users, to give context to the nature of the change and re-definition that may be required. In this I have been greatly assisted by a recent report published by the Online Computer Library Center (2005). If you have not already seen the report I commend it warmly to you as a rich, international source of market research data on perceptions of the library and its services, which should act as another wake-up call for us all.

The report followed on from an earlier environmental scan identifying some dissonance in expectations of libraries. User priorities were seen as ease of use, convenience and availability, all regarded as equally important to the information consumer as information quality and trustworthiness (Online Computer Library Center, 2003a). The objectives of the 2005 study were to ascertain how libraries are perceived by today's information consumer and to see whether libraries still matter and what future patterns of library use might be. With this acknowledgement let me pick out some of the salient headlines:

Libraries are seen as more trustworthy/credible and as providing more accurate information than search engines. Search engines are seen as more reliable, cost-effective, easy to use, convenient and fast. The library is not the first or only stop for many information seekers. Search engines are the favourite place to begin a search and respondents indicate that Google is the search engine most recently used to begin their searches. In addition users wanted 'more books' and longer and more convenient opening hours. Perhaps no surprises there!

Through increasing familiarity with search engines and the Web comes greater self-reliance of information consumers, who feel confident in their own evaluation of sources of all kinds. Survey respondents are generally satisfied with libraries and librarians but most do not plan to increase their use of libraries. Indeed the brand association of libraries appears to be rather depressingly nostalgic, traditional, and focussed on books. Even with their strong emotional attachment to the idea of the library there was clear dissatisfaction with the physical and service experience of the libraries they use. Poor signage, inhospitable surroundings, unfriendly staff, lack of parking, dirt, cold, hard-to-use systems and inconvenient hours were repeatedly mentioned.

And finally more on brand image. Most respondents feel that library is synonymous with books. Books dominated responses across all regions surveyed and across all age groups, despite libraries' growing investment in electronic resources and digital activities.

In summary, these findings do not make comfortable reading. I am sure that each one of you will wish to argue that the findings do not apply to your particular institution or type of library, but that might suggest a level of denial that would be inappropriate. The opportunities are there for significant re-branding and re-positioning, both in terms of the design and delivery of digital and physical services, recognising that the information landscape will if anything become even more competitive and consumers will become even more discerning and willing to take what information they need from wherever they can most conveniently and painlessly get it. The call to action suggests the need for much deeper understanding of each of our user communities; a much more developed sense of place as social context for services; and greater attention to relevance, distinctiveness and convenience of all of our future services.

How libraries stack up

Lest we get too concerned I would draw your attention to yet another Online Computer Library Center report (2003b) which through a range of statistical data re-affirms the importance and comparative scale of library activity, primarily but not exclusively in a USA context. The basis on which new opportunities can be built is immense:

- US public library cardholders outnumber Amazon customers by almost 5 to 1;
- each day, US libraries circulate nearly 4 times more items than Amazon handles;
- one out of every six people in the world is a registered library user;
- five times more people visit US public libraries each year than attend US professional and college football, basketball, baseball and hockey games combined;
- there are over 1 million libraries worldwide with 16 billion volumes; and
- there are some 690,000 librarians worldwide.

We already know how well information professionals network (virtually and physically); we already know how willing we are to share experience and best practice. These are strong characteristics that should serve us well as we seek to ramp up the scale and pace of change.

How do other industries respond to change?

I would like to turn now briefly to what, if any, help and understanding we might get from models for change more generally. When considering the issue of re-definition in the context of the British Library I have found the framework offered by McGahan (2004) in a *Harvard Business Review* article entitled 'How industries change'. She argues strongly that to develop strategy and make appropriate investments in innovation within the organisation requires a real understanding of the nature of change within the industry. This is of course easy to say but difficult to assess, particularly to take a long-term look in a rapidly changing short-term context. The business world is littered with misinterpretations of signs. She suggests, however, four distinctive trajectories of change – radical, progressive, creative, and intermediating.

I believe that libraries and information services (depending on their particular nature) are operating in an environment between intermediating and radical change. An industry on a radical change trajectory is entirely transformed, probably over a timescale of decades, with an end result of complete reconfiguration (usually diminished). Companies dealing with radical transformation it is suggested should move strongly to improve productivity in existing activities without significant investment, conduct experiments with new products and services and develop new distribution channels.

Intermediating change is more common than radical change. It is where the core assets – knowledge, brand, content, patents - retain much of their value if they are used in new ways. This requires the simultaneous preservation of valuable assets and re-structuring of key relationships, and means finding innovative and unconventional ways of extracting value from core resources. Managing this dual track approach is extremely challenging.

From a British Library perspective we continue to focus on increasing productivity and streamlining traditional processes (largely through systems changes); we are finding innovative ways of exploiting our core assets of content combined with expertise; and we are opening up new channels of delivery largely through digital partnerships and new service developments. This re-positioning in the digital library world, at the same time as sustaining our core statutory functions both for the print and digital domains, is a major leadership and management challenge requiring changes in structure, skills and investment patterns.

Digital library challenges

It is interesting to also consider the views of leading experts in digital library developments and associated research. Cliff Lynch (2005) in assessing prospects for digital libraries in the next decade suggests strongly that the major challenge is to:

Connect and integrate digital libraries with broader individual, group and societal activities, and doing this across meaningful time horizons that recognize digital libraries and related constructs as an integral and permanent part of the evolving information environment.

Additionally he argues that:

The issue of the future of libraries as social, cultural and community institutions, along with related questions about the character and treatment of what we have come to call “intellectual property” in our society, form perhaps the most central of the core questions within the discipline of digital libraries – and that these questions are too important to be left to libraries, who should be seen as nothing more than one group among a broad array of stakeholders.

This questioning of ‘what is a digital library anymore, anyway’ is echoed in a challenging article of this title by Carl Lagoze *et al.* (2005) at Cornell University. He worries about a perception that the ‘googlization’ of digital libraries and information more generally means that digital library problems have either already been solved or will be solved by Google, MSN, Yahoo! and others. One might regard this as simply a plea for more research funding from interested parties, or perhaps more seriously as a need for us to think well beyond search and access as presently conceived towards a much richer information environment for information sharing, aggregation, manipulation, collaborative working, and indeed digital preservation which Cliff Lynch sees as an enormous, fundamental societal issue for the next decade.

So where is all this leading us and what should we be doing?

I hope that so far in this keynote speech I have painted a broad picture of an increasingly challenging information environment within which libraries of all types operate. Just reflecting on developments within the last twelve months the pace of change is probably faster than any of us has experienced in our professional lives so far. In addition there is much evidence that in this new context whilst libraries are still valued there are increasing signs of dissatisfaction and perceptions of a lessening value compared with other options. However, the changing environment provides opportunities for re-defining our roles and our relevance and for developing new roles in a much wider range of public and private partnerships and collaborations. There is a need for strong strategic and thought leadership, more risk-taking than has generally been associated with libraries, and greater understanding of and attention to the changing demands of our different user populations.

I would like therefore in the final part of my talk to pull together some themes of general strategic relevance for the conference, drawing on our experience of major change, re-branding and strategy development at the British Library over the past few years. The British Library has become more externally-focussed and market-facing; we have rationalised and modernised our portfolio of services and have a higher public and government profile. We have faced up to difficult staffing issues, have brought in people with new and complementary skills and have invested to catch up on our technology infrastructure and do leading work in areas such as digital preservation.

Re-defining the library

I would like now to offer some themes that I believe will be central to the continuing re-definition and re-positioning of libraries to remain relevant in the 21st century. They are likely to be more or less relevant to you depending on the context of your service and are certainly not comprehensive.

1. Know your users and keep close to them (and your lost users and your non-users)

If there is a common message coming across from all those thinking deeply about the future of libraries it is that we need to be more deeply involved with our users to really understand how their work patterns are changing, to anticipate their future requirements and how information services can be better integrated with the increasingly digital life-style of new generations of students, researchers and knowledge workers.

The British Library had, like many libraries, for a long time viewed its users as a homogenous group of 'Readers'. In 2000, we looked closely at this group and identified, unsurprisingly, that all Readers were not the same. Using expertise from commercial marketing we identified clear audiences, all of whom had specific ideas of what they needed from the Library:

Researchers, including staff in higher and further education; postgraduates; high R&D industries; writers and scholars; government researchers; the Library network; schools and young people; individuals - including undergraduates – pursuing their own research projects; the wider, general public; and business,

which was identified as a core audience which at that stage was under-utilising the wealth of resources the Library had to offer.

Our core functions as a great research Library are primary but our users and their needs are varied and distinct. Defining a Library that will balance the needs of the humanities professor and the new entrepreneur and the undergraduate with approaching finals and the office worker looking for somewhere pleasant to spend their lunchbreak, is a challenge, but our new, focused understanding of who our users are is an important catalyst for creativity in approaching the rest of my core themes.

2. Re-think the physical spaces of the library and create a 'desirable draw'

Libraries should aim to be uplifting, innovative and inspiring cultural, social and intellectual spaces, encouraging debate and collaboration, and desirable as places to be in, even in the age of ubiquitous Internet access. Some of the best models for the future will come, not simply from existing libraries (although there are some stunning international examples) but also from bookshops, Apple stores, museums and galleries and new concepts in retailing spaces. If the British Library is the physical representation of the information age, what should it be like? Can the surroundings and atmosphere add value – even enhance – the information we are providing?

While defining our users, we identified that we were underutilised by business and entrepreneurs: an important audience for ourselves and for our role as support to the UK's creative and technological economy. Market research showed that for every £1 of public investment we received, we generated £4.40 of national value. How could we expand the use business made of our resources? What could we do to make ourselves more appealing to them?

We found a good model in the New York Public Library's Science, Industry and Business Library and I am proud that, one month tomorrow, the British Library's Business and IP centre will open. The aim will be to deliver a coherent programme of support at each stage of the innovation lifecycle: information support and networking space, with expert support from partner organisations on business planning, financial development and intellectual property.

But rethinking our physical space need not always mean rebuilding it. The British Library's St Pancras site had just opened when I arrived in 2000, after a costly and protracted building process. Much of what we have done in the last five years has been about encouraging new audiences to come and use us as a public amenity. Every summer now we have live music sessions on the piazza and tying into our launch of Mozart's digitised musical diary our central foyer was filled by people listening to live performances of Mozart string quartets. We have installed London's largest public wi-fi space and are becoming a place of choice for laptop users as well as delivering an additional resource for our core researchers. And before Christmas we gained much media coverage for our Nobel Prize Exhibition through our second "Mingles" evening billed under the strapline "In love with science and want to share your passion? Come and meet other like-minded single people and attend an open evening at the Exhibition". Libraries can be sexy - over 400 new visitors came along that night.

3. Integrate marketing in your organisation and in the way you approach strategy and service development

My two previous themes have not been about changing the core library function of repository and steward, but have been about changing our attitudes to that function to take a proactive approach to engaging our users and marketing our resources to meet their needs. As we seek to redefine ourselves it is essential that we integrate marketing into the way we approach strategy and service development.

In 2000, for the first time we introduced a directorate for Strategic Marketing and Communication, headed up by a respected commercial specialist to help us do this. Our marketing had traditionally concentrated in promotional marketing activity without sufficient emphasis on positioning or branding. Curators were the driving force behind much of what we did with the effect that too often we could be focused on our own areas of interest and expertise rather than connected to those of our users. The new Marketing Director led on the tough questions – Who are our users? What is our proposition to them? – and sought to engage all Library staff in considering the answers.

The result has not been simply rethinking how we use our space, or improving signage and welcome, or remodelling our Treasures gallery to best display the jewels of the nation's heritage: rather, a dynamic synergy between curatorial and marketing staff has emerged. Exhibitions are now agreed and taken forward on the basis of whether they will meet a market need and then developed in tandem with promotional events. Our most successful exhibition drew upon curatorial expertise and knowledge and enhanced this with a marketing edge. The result was a journey down the Silk Road, including letters, maps, objects, the Diamond Sutra, the world's oldest printed book and drew record breaking numbers of visitors. It was supported by a series of seminars and lectures drawing in new audiences to hear a range of speakers and experts.

4. Open up your legacy print collections to digital channels and reveal them through digitisation

Extracting new value from core assets is a key part of managing 'intermediating change'. Many of the great libraries represented here have unique assets, particularly in their primary collections of archives, manuscripts and rare materials. In addition the scale and scope of secondary source material (even just considering the corpus of out of copyright material) that can be digitised and therefore made infinitely more visible and accessible to the world is enormous. There are great opportunities here for libraries to find new channels, deliver public value and ensure business models that enable sustainability. The latter, however, depends on some careful thinking on the value of the intellectual property over which we have stewardship balanced against many of our professional aspirations to open our content freely to everyone. It is always worth reflecting that initial one-off costs of digitisation pale into insignificance set against a commitment to perpetual access and preservation of the newly created digital asset.

The British Library's award winning Turning the Pages (TTP) programme and technology has been a direct product of our thinking about how digital can help us open up access to some of our most valuable items - and it is a source of immense pleasure to me that it has been seized by many of the institutions here today for doing that with their own treasures.

At its start TTP was about helping us give members of the public access to precious books while keeping the originals safely under glass, allowing them to virtually 'turn' the pages of manuscripts in a realistic way, using touch-screen technology and interactive animation. But that initial step was just the beginning of the potential digitisation affords us as we rise to the challenges of 'intermediating change'.

The British Library has developed a set of assessment criteria to help us prioritise areas of our collections for digitisation. High on our list is our vast collection of newspapers, due to its fragile nature. Not only is there a huge collection of at risk material that could be digitised, but also, the time-based nature of newspapers makes them ideal to 'map' and link to other historical collections and items. We are also exploring opportunities for digitising our unique audio collection. Audio resources are generally harder to manage and the resultant resource is more difficult to search, relying as it does on metadata. However much progress has been made in speech recognition technology and automated full-text creation of audio content may soon be possible, making searching of speech based items much easier.

Digitisation also makes exciting reunification projects possible, increasing the world's knowledge and advancing digital scholarship. Three weeks ago we launched a virtually-united leaf of Mozart's musical diary - cut into two pieces 200 years ago by the widowed and impoverished Mrs Mozart to increase the total sale value. TTP has given the world access to previously unknown music and a catalogue of complete works integrating sound from the sound archive into the digitised work. The BBC covered the story and our website recorded a record number of hits as people linked through to us on the back of media coverage.

And many of you will already know about the unprecedented collaboration underway to digitally reunify the Codex Sinaiticus involving all four of the institutions at which parts of the manuscript are held: St Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, the British Library, the University of Leipzig and the National Library of Russia.

Digitisation opens doors to new and dynamic partnerships. Last autumn the British Library announced its intention to work with Microsoft to digitise 100,000 out of copyright books and make them available over the Internet. There are complex intellectual property issues involved in such partnership working, but I view the Microsoft deal as an example of how libraries can work with the new players in the information arena as we modernise and update our services.

5. Reduce legacy costs and continue to improve productivity in traditional library activities

Underpinning the functioning of our libraries are many traditional processes and activities – selection, acquisition, cataloguing, fetching and retrieving, preserving, and so on. We need to be vigilant to ensure that these well-worn routines continue to be challenged both in the way we do them and the priority we give them. Freeing up resources for investment in new things, and in that I include freeing up our best staff, as well as creating funds for research and technological innovation will be critical if we are to keep up with changing expectations. This sometimes means challenging long-assumed professional roles and other entrenched working arrangements.

For over 40 years the British Library's document supply service has fulfilled a critical role in the UK's information provision and remains the world's largest document supplier. At its peak level of demand in 1998/99 – only six years ago – it was fulfilling over 4 million requests for individual documents annually – three million to UK customers and one million overseas. But demand has slowed in recent years because of the new opportunities provided for through the 'big deals' and easier digital access.

Three years ago, the library embarked upon a programme of extensive modernisation of our document supply operation, partly funded by the UK Government's Invest To Save Budget. The library replaced all photocopiers with state of the art scanning stations, which enable us to deliver all documents electronically regardless of their original format and which have reduced standard turnaround times from days to just hours.

6. Invest more in innovation and digital activities

One of our real challenges is to create enough resources for faster innovation and investment in experiments and new digital services. All of us have opportunities for adding value to our communities through new roles such as institutional repository management, digital asset management and audit, digital scholarship, e-learning activities, and so on. Some of these roles require new kinds of consortial and other partnerships across the public and the private sector.

The Legal Deposit Libraries Act 2003 has given us responsibility for archiving the UK's digital output and we are preparing the infrastructure and methodology for this now. No-one has exactly the product we are looking for, so we are using a combination approach, of buying in components and working with the supplier to develop them to meet our needs as DOM – our Digital Object Management System.

The first practical release of the storage system provides a preservation-quality digital store for material received under the Voluntary Deposit scheme. Subsequent releases will add more functionality to this. We will then extend this service to handle other types of material, initially e-journals. Other high priority materials are CDs, DVDs, and other 'hand-held' items, and the growing number of digital newspapers. Technical direction of the solution architecture has been validated by two external Technical Advisory Panels.

We are now focusing on ingest and are in the process of selecting a vendor. Requirements for other functions (data management, administration, and access) are being developed. Digital preservation is being addressed by a newly-recruited team and we are building European partnerships.

7. Develop our people and ensure that we have the right mix of skills

I believe that the role of librarian and information professional has never been more important, but what we mean by librarian has to be reconsidered. It is we, not just our institutions, who must face up to intermediating change.

The information professionals of the future need to be outward-going people, with really sharp business skills and a huge understanding of technology and the implications of the Internet. They need to be able to understand and engage with users to bring their collections to life, in a way that a search engine on someone's desk simply cannot. They need to concentrate on what they are good

at - information management, metadata, reference services, to name but a few - and be ruthless about bringing in specialisms they need from outside to add value to their core tasks.

Because it is the mixture that is so powerful. Very few of the examples I have given today of how we at the British Library are redefining ourselves for the 21st century would have been possible without the new blend of skills and expertise we have acquired over the last five years.

My final point is to encourage us all to have a much stronger voice in the grand challenge debates that are part of the development of the digital society and economy. There are many big and complex policy issues that are live at national government, European and indeed global level. As library and information professionals we should speak robustly to ensure appropriate balances between public interest and commercial imperatives in digital copyright and intellectual property regulation; we should be central in working on and piloting new and sustainable business models for digital services; and we should widen understanding and debate about the importance to society and to individuals of digital preservation.

Concluding remarks

I would like to conclude simply with a quote from the Library's founders when they brought together the original collections in 1753 to be 'preserved therein for publick use, to all posterity' providing access to the world's knowledge for 'all studious and curious persons'.

At this early stage of the 21st century it is arguably the technological geeks who, in their fight to win a browser war, are doing most to re-interpret and fulfil the utopian dream of universal access. It is imperative that we, as the custodians of the world's knowledge create our own vision and contribution to this desired future by re-defining the library to be relevant for this and future generations.

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