Title
Creating a New Reference Librianship: An OCLC Institute

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/368706cz

Journal
Library Hi Tech News, 19(7)

ISSN
7419058

Author
Gelfand, Julia

Publication Date
2002-07-01

DOI
10.1108/lhtn.2002.23919gac.005

License
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/ 4.0

Peer reviewed

Creating a New Reference Librianship: An OCLC Institute

Julia Gelfand, (2002) "Creating a New Reference Librianship: An OCLC Institute", Library Hi Tech News, Vol. 19 Issue: 7.

Creating a New Reference Librianship: An OCLC Institute

Julia Gelfand

The OCLC Research Institute (www.oclc.org/research) hosts a variety of programs and, research projects, and releases numerous important publications each year on a vareity of topics. In addition, it holds professional development seminars on various themes. This most recent seminar highlighted ideas that will influence the new models of reference librarianship that must emerge if we, as members of a profession, seek to thrive and survive with more competition for information provision from the Web. Thus, this seminar, held May 20-22, 2002 at the new Lied Library at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (http://www.library.unlv.edu/) provided the forum for one strategy about how to rethink reference services and collections. Holding this seminar in such a new physical facility that just opened over a year ago forces one to wonder whether the assignment of space in a library will continue to be configured to house collections of millions of physical objects. Or will libraries indeed become more of a digital presence containing more and more terminals and wireless connections so access will be even more pronounced. If this visit to UNLV is any indication, we will see more libraries designing space to meet the needs of an even greater user community inclined to access information in the "here and now." We are truly at a crossroads where print and electronic content collide – there is clearly room for both as we see more of an emphasis on the e-environment. This convergence was precisely the point of this seminar.

Attending a seminar hosted by OCLC promised several things that convinced me to attend. First, that I would likely encounter colleagues from other library environments, enriching the case studies and discussion with experiences from their point of operation. Second, I would gain some insight into how OCLC is thinking about public services, not only about technical services and collections, the platforms on which they built their legacy and enterprise. I was not disappointed in the first assumption, but the enrollment was, as could be expected, composed mostly of academic librarians with a smattering of public and special librarians. However, when it came to the role of OCLC entertaining some leadership in this arena, public services is not driving the action; instead it is the element of bibliographic control or resource description (formerly known as cataloging) using metadata to position itself.

Martin Dillon, the retired former director of the OCLC Research Institute, was the course instructor and leader. The curriculum was intended to stress how reference services have changed due to the proliferation of Web resources and dependency on them. Thus, the migration from cataloging and traditional reference to knowledge access management was the jist of the content. Knowledge access management is defined as the convergence or intersection of cataloging and reference to form this new practice that responds to new

methodologies or approaches to information. In fairness, one must share what a complex process that is and that it is no simple feat to reinvent library services that can scale easily to serve the diverse constituencies that all libraries have.

The meta-questions that must be addressed include:

1. What changes will knowledge industries undergo in the near future?

2. What are the consequences for libraries? How will they treat:

- collections;

- cataloging;

- reference?

One definition of knowledge management suggests that it is a "discipline that promotes an integrated approach to identifying, capturing, evaluating, retrieving and sharing all of an enterprise's information assets." If library science is a "discipline that promotes an integrated approach to identifying, capturing, evaluating, retrieving and sharing all of a society's knowledge and information assets," then the course set up its objective to be to define the goal of knowledge management as:

1. To deliver everything a knowledge user needs to achieve his or her objective.

2. Where, when and how the user wishes:

- Where – anywhere the Web goes.

- When – 24/7.

- How – in all formats and products, emphasizing e-content.

So these goals force a major rethinking. Many of us are already familiar with and practicing new methods to reach and serve users. The most prevalent one is that we are communicating with our users in alternative and different ways. In addition to offering a traditional reference desk service that requires the user to come to the library, we are offering reference assistance by telephone, fax, e-mail, off-the-desk research consultation, various forms of instruction, and by the Web utilizing tools and software that allow for chat, and face-to-face interaction.

In the spirit of being more customer responsive, customer relationship management (CRM) was introduced, as were different methods of describing and classifying Web documents. The work of IFLA's Standing Committee on Cataloging via the Final Report of "Functional requirements for bibliographic records (FRBR)" and the work at the Library of Congress force the question, "why catalog at all?" This institute spent a fair amount of time exploring metadata schemes such as the Dublin Core that can capture knowledge and provide

description by using metadata. The transition between different mark-up languages, such as SGML, HTML and now XML forces the question of whether "MARC is really dead." As more library catalogs begin to enter masses of Web sites in their OPACs one needs to study MARC vs XML for how to record the appropriate metadata. For reference librarians this content may have been new, as few reference librarians have strong cataloging backgrounds and can dissect the elements of a record to the levels of specificity that make the elements so critical.

Trends in static linking are best illustrated by SFX, covered in several previous issues of LHTN, where the OpenURL selects appropriate links through collaborative system control in a framework that offers options for ILL, OPAC holdings, database contents, citations, eTOC of books and other materials, fulltext and e-print archives, and obviously Web content. This increased interoperability transports metadata or keys to access metadata for the desired object.

Within the reference service model, over the past couple of years, we have seen a proliferation of disintermediated virtual reference models launched through search engines (AskERIC, AskJeeves, RefDesk.com, Xrefer.com, Stumpers.com, and other reference interfaces), e-mail reference practices, and different uses of reference in real time that to date include instant messaging, chat and advanced online reference systems. At this Institute, demonstrations of the eGain software by Library Systems & Services, Inc, (LSSI) took place (www.lssi.com/virtual/) and discussions about how to launch, grow and manage this version of online virtual reference. Other resources that were shared include:

- Assessing Quality in Digital Reference (www.quartz.syr.edu/quality/).

- Building the Virtual Reference Desk Conference Proceedings (www.loc.gov/rr/digiref/webcasts/).

- Virtual Reference Desk 3rd Annual Conference October 2001 (www.vrd.org/conferences/VRD2001/proceedings/).

- Index of Chat Reference Software (http://pages.prodigy.net/tabo1/chatsoftware.htm).

- Librarians Index to the Internet (http://www.lii.org/).

- Live Reference Bibliography (www.public.iastate.edu/~CYBERSTACKS/LiveRef.htm).

- OCLC CORC – (www.oclc.org/corc/).

- Ready for Reference pilot project Final Report (www.lis.uiuc.edu/~bsloan/read4ref.htm).

- SFX – (www.sfx.com).

- QuestionPoint (http://www.questionpoint.org/).

So what does this all mean? Libraries need to consider how to best scale reference services to meet the increasing demands created by Web publishing and resources. Clearly, the human side of this is not the answer, but creating digital responses on a scale that can be shared and implemented via consortia and other partnerships have great potential. An international database containing questions and solutions organized in knowledge access management will influence the future of reference in many ways. By considering the social, economic and technological trends, we will see how users depend upon libraries and the content it organizes. Information-rich access will be the key, with new partners participating in the process including commercial firms, cooperatives and other combinations of libraries and providers emerging all the time. With better descriptive access of Web information, and the trend to reduce print holdings in libraries, a new strategy of reference service will emerge. Clearly, we are at the beginning stages of a new model for reference librarianship.

Julia Gelfand (jgelfand@uci.edu) is the Applied Sciences & Engineering Librarian at the University of California, Irvine Libraries and an adjunct member of the faculty at the University of Arizona School of Information Resources and Library Science where she will teach Reference Bibliography and Services in Summer 2002.