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Online Work Tools: A Look at 20 Academic Libraries Technical Services Web Pages

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Introduction

As a member of the Western Kentucky University Libraries (WKUL) web team, part of my responsibility is to develop and maintain our Technical Services unit and departmental web pages. Two years ago I developed our department's Online Resources web site and have since then been responsible for the additions to and upkeep of the pages. I became curious as to how other university libraries were accessing online resources, and thus began this investigation. I was very surprised to find that not all technical services departments, along with the units residing within, have a substantial presence on the Web. This spurred me to investigate further the literature pertaining to this topic of which I also found little.

The 21st century technical services librarian has access to a plethora of electronic and online work tools from which to choose to complete daily tasks. While authors focus significantly on the public services aspect of online tools, such as databases and websites, few articles exist concerning the new methods technical services librarians are employing to complete their tasks. Khurshid noted in 2003 that "libraries are showing a clear preference for electronic versions of these tools because of their ease of use and update, better display, and lower cost." [1] The primary purpose of this paper is to address the inclusion of online work tools on technical services departmental web pages. An assessment of the WKUL and its 19 benchmark institutions (Appendix A) shows a great disparity of online resources made available through university libraries technical services departments. Four main areas are addressed in this paper: the overall technical services, cataloging, serials, and acquisitions web pages.

Literature Review / Historical Background

From the technical services standpoint, Hopkins noted early articles in library literature focused on the relationship with the World Wide Web (WWW) and the online public access catalog (OPAC). [2] With machine readable cataloging (MARC) intact, cataloging and serials seemed perfectly poised to make a smooth transfer into this new realm of librarianship. Terms such as WWW, URL (Uniform Resource Locator), Telnet, and Gopher evoked great expectations of this new technology and what it would bring to the workplace. Henderson describes how acquisition departments found websites dedicated to locating and ordering materials very useful. [3] Expansion of these services soon flourished with another great benefit, as noted by McCoy, when vendors began to allow online ordering. [4] McCoy also warned that paying online via credit card for such convenience can be a risky behavior, which shows how rapidly technology is evolving when one considers that today so much banking is done electronically! [5]

With the onslaught of this new web technology came ease of communication. Perhaps the most helpful online tool comes directly from the users themselves, the listserv. [6] Today there are hundreds, if not thousands, of these electronic discussion lists that aid the flow of information. Groups range in topics from all-encompassing, such as the Library Cataloging and Authorities Discussion Group (AUTOCAT) that covers all aspects of cataloging issues, to narrower subsets, as with the Cooperative Cataloging Arrangements Between Libraries Discussion Group (COOPCAT). These mechanisms are useful not only for problem solving, but also as a means to stay current in the literature and with new trends. [7]

Access in the form of who could or should use these new resources was also an emerging issue. With Internet access came surfing the web – people soon realized that time slips away easily as one magically links from one site to another. Library managers and supervisors questioned the need for support staff to find practical use in these online tools. In regard to time management and productivity issues Landesman and Oberg reported from a 1995 North American Serials Interest Group (NASIG) conference workshop that "members of the audience generally agreed on the importance of encouraging staff to learn how to navigate the Internet, yet concern was voiced as to whether all staff need to be involved." [8] However, McCoy described electronic access as a "conference" from your seat where support staff becomes involved in discussions and debates, thus contributing to staff improvement and growth. [9] Additional benefits include participation in professional development activities and continuing education opportunities without incurring travel costs.

As more people were exposed to this fast-paced and exciting new technology, technical services librarians began to harness these resources and use them for their specific needs, thus creating their own web pages. Terry, Greenblatt, and Hashert stated reasons for creating such a page: (1) centralization of information, (2) currency, (3) customization, (4) efficiency, and (5) communication. A natural transition occurred from the generalized, contact-information-only web pages to more specific pages dedicated to specific work divisions and tasks. [10] Brown gave examples of useful information an acquisition librarian might include, such as collection development announcements, collection statistics, and links to other libraries web pages for other helpful links. [11] She went on to say, "By creating a local collection of Web resources, we can customize that

collection to best meet the needs of our community." [12] This community includes not only customers, but librarians as well. Apart from specific areas, technical services departmental web pages in general make it easy to dispense the most current and up-to-date documentation, departmental goals, and annual reports along with the possibility to highlight special accomplishments. [13]

The task of creating a web page is something to be carefully planned in order to ensure a well-designed and functioning site.

- ❑ Consideration should be given to who will create and maintain the site and who will be allowed access, as well as why it should be created in the first place, who will be the target audience, and what types of information will be included. [14,15]

- ❑ The Nanyang Techological University (NTU) located in Singapore described outcomes from the development of their cataloging department web page as providing access to documentation and online resources, department policies, training and work procedures, and a "canned" tour of the department. [16]

- ❑ Blosser, Hagan, and Zhang listed many web sites for the serial cataloger to consider when developing a site. [17] They divided these into three categories: (1) How to, (2) Support [documentation], and (3) Editorial [references].

- ❑ The development of the University of Cincinnati's technical services web page resulted in the assurance that all employees have access to the same information and or documentation and that it could be easily kept up-to-date. [18]

A study by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) conducted in 2003 showed that of the 60 randomly sampled, only 12 had a technical services web page. [19] The

study concluded that the overall size of the library has a direct correlation with the existence of a technical services departmental web page.

The next logical step is the types of tools that are included on technical services web pages. Chressanthis and Wesley conducted a survey of 40 similar size technical services web sites and discovered that 27 institutions had pages beyond the essential contact information.[20] Of these, 19 included external links with a combined total of 2,164 unique links. In December 2002, Mundle, Zhao, and Bangalore looked at 10 consortium libraries cataloging department web pages. [21] They found most pages were simple in design. Nine sites held external links including links to online cataloging tools, 8 cataloging department pages held links to local documentation, yet only 3 linked to professional literature, and only 2 provided links to professional organizations. Apparently, then no continuity exists for the information or links provided through library technical services web pages.

The technical services areas of academic libraries primarily serve the same purpose, to acquire and to provide access to library materials; therefore, it stands to reason that the same basic online work tools would be utilized. However, this does not seem to be happening -- similarities in purpose are not reflected in the use of similar online work tools. This paper will further investigate this phenomenon of inconsistent technical services online work tools.

Methodology

The author studied 20 Libraries based on the WKUL benchmark institutions, thus ensuring common size and goals. From January 19-20, 2005, the author examined each library to see if online tools were listed. These sites were broken down into 4 areas to

organize the study: the overall technical services web page, cataloging department, serials department, and the acquisitions department. Four Excel spreadsheets were created, one for each area of study; the online tools that were present under the corresponding page was entered on the Y-axis, while each library was given an alpha letter A-T and entered on the X-axis. The assigning of arbitrary alpha letters was done in order to not draw negative attention to the libraries involved in this study. A tally was completed to determine what common technical services online work tools were being used amongst the sample group of libraries. In an effort to conduct a thorough study, links embedded within the same sites were each counted individually as unique links. For example, if a library linked to the main page of the American Library Association (ALA) and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), a division within ALA, then each link was recorded on the spreadsheet resulting in a count of two.

Results

Of the web sites existing among the 20 libraries, 4 had general technical services links to online tools; 9 had online cataloging tools, 5 libraries had a page dedicated to serials online tools, and 3 had a page for acquisitions online tools. A total of 644 links were present among the 21 pages.

The 4 library technical services pages contained a total of 204 links; 190 of these were unique. A further look shows Library A with 105 links (51.4 %), followed by Library P with 76 links (37.25%), Library O with 18 links (8.82%), and Library K with 5 links (2.45%) to online tools.

Cataloging units comprised the largest number of links in the study. Of the 9 libraries that held cataloging pages, 392 links were present of which were 334 unique.

Library T had 245 links (62.5%), Library I, 47 links (12%), Library N, 30 links (7.65%), Library O, 19 links (4.85%), Library A, 17 links (4.34%), Libraries D and J had 12 links each (3.06%), and Libraries B and P, 5 links each (1.27%).

Of the 29 links present on the 5 serials pages, 26 were unique. Library A held 20 links (69%), Library B, 4 links (13.8%), Libraries N and O had 2 links each (3.45%), and Library I held 1 link (3.45%).

Acquisition links were found on 3 libraries web sites. A total of 19 links were found, 17 being unique. Library A had 9 links (47.4%), Library O had 8 links (42.10%), and Library I had 2 links (10.53%).

Perhaps the most interesting results were the common online tools within each unit. A wide range of tools was found with very little overlap among libraries. Table 1 shows those sites that were present on at least 2 technical services library web pages. No links were duplicated on 4 or more library web sites, and the vast majority of those duplicated were listed on 2 or less of the libraries pages. The cataloging unit produced the highest overlap for one tool, a link to the OCLC Bibliographic Formats and Standards. As seen in Table 2, there was more commonality within cataloging than the other three units. While acquisition and serial online tools were fewer, it stands to reason with less tools being utilized that more overlap would occur. This was not the case. For each of these units there were no online tools listed on 4 or more library pages (Table 3).

Conclusions

Initially I set out to discover which online tools other university libraries had on their web sites that were similar to those developed by WKUL. Surprisingly only 50% of the 20 libraries had any substantial [beyond department personnel contact information]

presence on the web. These findings support the earlier studies of Chressanthis and Wesley [22] and Wang and Gao. [23] There seems to be very little consistency among the 10 libraries that have web pages dedicated to online tools. Of the 4 units studied, the cataloging department pages had the highest number and most overlap of links to online work.

Questions still left to answer include: 1) If department web pages are not being used, then how are librarians accessing these online tools – or are they? 2) Are intranets being used? 3) Are librarians more likely to use the bookmark function on their individual PC's? 4) Have those libraries with no online tools found that the constant maintenance of these web pages is not a good use of time when these tools can be accessed from other sources on the Web? The next step in this research will be to survey these libraries in hopes of learning more about how they access these essential online work tools that enable technical services librarians to complete daily tasks.

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Appendix A
Western Kentucky University Libraries Benchmark Institutions

Appalachian State University
Ball State University
Bowling Green State University
California State University, Fresno
Central Missouri State University
Eastern Illinois University
Eastern Michigan University
Illinois State University
Indiana State University
Kent State University
Northern Michigan University
Southeast Missouri State University
University of Akron
University of North Carolina, Greensboro
University of Northern Iowa
West Chester University of Pennsylvania
Western Carolina University
Western Illinois University
Youngstown State University

Most Common Technical Services Online Tool	Number of Libraries That Link to Tool
AcqWEB	3
NASIG	3
ACRL	2
ALA/GODORT Toolbox for Processing & Cataloging Federal Gov Documents	2
ALCTS	2
American Library Association	2
Association of Research Libraries	2
Center for Research Libraries	2
LC Online Catalogs	2
Licensing Electronic Resources	2
MARC Standards	2
Principles for Licensing Electronic Resources	2
Serials in Cyberspace	2

Table 1. Popular online technical services tools

Most Common Cataloging Online Tool	Number of Libraries That Link to Tool
OCLC Bibliographic Formats and Standards	6
Cataloging Calculator	4
Cataloging Electronic Resources: OCLC-MARC Coding Guidelines	4
Library of Congress Online Catalog	4
MARC 21 Concise Format for Bibliographic Data	4
Catalogers Reference Shelf	3
Cataloging Internet Resources: A Manual and Practical Guide	3
Cataloguer's Toolbox	3
Library of Congress Understanding MARC	3
Sheet Music Cataloging Guidelines (Music Library Association)	3

Table 2. Popular online cataloging tools

Most Common Acquisitions Online Tool	Number of Libraries That Link to Tool
AcqWEB	3

Most Common Serials Online Tool	Number of Libraries That Link to Tool
AcqWEB	3
North American Serials Interest Group (NASIG)	3
Serials in Cyberspace	2

Table 3. Popular online acquisitions and serials tools