President's Message: Doing Something about Life's Persistent Problems?

Mark Beatty

Currently we librarians seem to be hitching our wagon to the idea of library as community because in part it's what we ourselves want. We've seen that our LITA members want more community from our association, so it makes sense to us that our patrons also want community. It's what Pew, OCLC, and other studies seem to be telling us. The business-wired side of the world is breaking their backs to create every form of virtual community they can think of as quickly as possible. Apply the appropriate amounts of marketing and then our patrons want those things and expect them from all of their historically important community resources, the library being a prime player in that group. So we strive and strive and strive to not only provide the standard issue face-to-face community we've always created, but to also create that new highly desired virtual community. Either we create a library-specific version, or we at the very least create a way for our patrons to access those communities. Hopefully, when our patrons step into those virtual communities, we work to make it possible for them to find libraries there, too.

All well and good, but do we have a plan? What's the goal? What's the end achievement? If, as studies say, patrons with a research need turn to libraries first only one percent of the time, and instead first hit up friends and family fifty or more percent of the time, then where is our significance and place in either the physical or virtual spaces? We know we serve significant numbers in many ways. We have gate counts, circulation records, holds placed, warm bodies in the building—all manners of indicators that show a well-managed and -marketed library is in demand and appreciated.

As we run into the terrible head-on crash of community and technology, willy-nilly doing absolutely everything we can to accommodate everyone and everything, because we're librarians and library technologists and that's what we do, do we really have a clue why we're doing it?

All fodder for deep thought and many lattes or beers and late night discussions. On the LITA side, though, we're embarking on doing something about this knot when it comes to serving our members. Under the guidance of Past-President Bonnie Postlethwaite we've established an Assessment and Research Committee co-chaired by Bonnie and Diane Bisom. To kick off the committee activities and to help them establish an agenda and direction, LITA hired the research firm The Wedewer Group to work with the LITA board and the new committee. Stay tuned for reports and announcements from this committee as it works to find answers to some of those questions. And have that latte with a LITA colleague as you seek to find some answers yourself. It's all part of building community.

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