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ALA Annual Conference, Washington DC: LITA Top Tech Trends Update

Mitchell Brown

The Library and Information Technology Association Division (LITA) hosts a Top Technology Trends Forum when six leaders in the field share what they think has had the biggest impact for library technologies over the year. Reports are posted on the division's Web site (www.ala.org/ala/lita/litaresources/toptechtrends/toptechnology.htm) and having a running record of these trends is always interesting to read and review. Podcasts and blog entries (http://litablog.org/category/top-technology-trends/) for the 2007 conference are available.

Maurice York (Associate Head Information Technology, North Carolina State University) moderated the panel presentation in large and historic ballroom in the Mayflower Hotel, Washington, DC with approximately 500 people in the audience. The panel of seven spoke for several minutes each and the audience presented questions to the panel during the 2 h program. The top technology trends discussed included RFID, open source adoption in libraries, and the importance of privacy. Member of the panel were John Blyberg, Karen Coombs, Roy Tennant, Marshall Breeding, Walt Crawford, and Joan Frye Williams. Podcasts and blog entries for the individual speakers are available from the LITA website (http://litablog.org/category/top-technology-trends/).

Trend: open source ILS

Marshall Breeding (http://staffweb.library.vanderbilt.edu/breeding/), director for innovative technologies and research at Vanderbilt University Libraries (TN), began as first speaker on the Top Tech Trends panel by referencing his LJ *Automation Marketplace* article, "An Industry Redefined," (www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6429251.html), in which he predicted "unprecedented disruption" in the integrated library system (ILS) market. He spoke about the pressures on libraries being forced to change integrated systems due to products being discontinued. Breeding said 60 per cent of the libraries in one state are facing a migration due to the Sirsi/Dynix product roadmap being changed, but he said "not all ILS companies are the same". Breeding said open source interest in Apache and Linux has been used as infrastructure in libraries for many years, but is new to the ILS world as a product. Interest has now expanded from the technology adventurers to the decision makers. The Evergreen PINES project (http://libraryjournal.com/article/CA6396354.html) in Georgia is a "most successful" example, with 55 of 58 counties participating. With the recent decision to adopt Evergreen in British Columbia and other libraries exploring Koha (www.koha.org/), there is movement to open source solutions. However Breeding cautioned the relative numbers of open source adoptions are "miniscule" compared to libraries with commercial ILS.

Will there be a switch to open source becoming an avalanche? Breeding said several commercial support companies have sprung up to serve the open source ILS market, including Liblime (http://liblime.com/), Equinox (http://esilibrary.com/), and CARe Affiliates (www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6453007.html). Breeding predicted an era of "new decoupled interfaces". There is a new emphasis to change the front-end interfaces ("front ends") of library systems to match expectations of the library users.

Trend: ILS "backend" support and RFID

John Blyberg (www.blyberg.net/), head of technology and digital initiatives at Darien Public Library (CT), said the "back end [in the ILS] needs to be shored up because it has a ripple effect" on other services. The operational infrastructure side of the ILS needs to be robust enough to support interfaces and user actions, else the ILS performance will suffer. Blyberg talked about RFID as a coming technology, and it makes sense for use in sorting and book storage, echoing Lori Bowen Ayre's earlier talk at ALA (www.galecia.com/weblog/mt/archives/000268.php) point that libraries need to create a market for and "support the distribution demands of the *Long Tail*". For more on the "Long Tail" see Lorcan Dempsey "Libraries and the Long Tail: Some Thoughts about Libraries in a Network Age". *D-Lib Magazine* April 2006 (www.dlib.org/dlib/april06/dempsey/04dempsey.html).

RFID privacy concerns have been raised for tagging books but Blyberg counters that "privacy concerns are non-starters, because RFID is essentially a barcode". With RFID information is stored in a database the focus of security concerns should be protection of data and not the detection of RFID tags.

Finally, Blyberg said that vendor interoperability and a democratic approach to development is needed in the age of Innovative's Encore and Ex Libris' Primo, both which can be used with different ILS systems and can decouple the public catalog from the ILS. With the xTensible catalog (xC) (www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6365210.html) and Evergreen coming along, Blyberg said there was a need for funding and partners to further enhance their development.

There was some discussion between Walt Crawford and John Blyberg about what Crawford described as "lead to the erosion of patron privacy" by introducing RFID to patron barcodes. Could details of individuals reading

habits be data-mined by an intruder to the system database? Joan Frye Williams countered that both Blyberg and Crawford were "insisting on using logic on what is essentially a political problem". Williams commented that RFID issues with the libraries were about getting the RFID message out since libraries rather than legal challenges.

Trend: end user as contributor, digital as format of choice, desktop and web become one

Karen Coombs (www.librarywebchic. net/), head of web services at the University of Houston (TX), discussed three trends:

- The end user as content contributor but the long-term disposition of the material is unclear. Coombs commented that currently more than 62 per cent of all US households own digital cameras and using YouTube, Blip.tv, Flickr, and other web-based services to distribute them. "What happens if YouTube goes under and people lose their memories?" There is a huge potential for the born electronic material to be lost and libraries need to think about capturing it. Coombs referred to her grandfather who sent letters back from war but today the soldiers in Iraq are emailing, blogging, and posting digital photos. Who is preserving that? Coombs described the "Picture Australia Project" (www.pictureaustraliaorg/) by the National Library of Australia and its partnership with Flickr as a positive development.
- Digital as format of choice for users and referring to examples such as iTunes for music and Joost for video. Coombs said the library has no provision for supplying streaming video, audio, and other online servers, "especially in public libraries". Though companies like Overdrive and Recorded Books exist to serve this need, perhaps her point was that the consumer adoption has superseded current library demand. Coombs challenged the audience to think about a broader definition of user support.
- 'I know everyone will cringe if I mention e-books" but we have to see that e-books are not the

problem, the problem is the reading mechanism. Karen has 12 book cases of books and would really appreciate this stuff digitally. We have to get in this game, how do we get in this game?

- A blurred line between desktop and web applications, which Coombs demonstrated with Google Docs (http://docs.google.com/), YouTube remixer (www.youtube.com/ytremixer) and Google Gears (http://gears. google.com/), "which lets you read your feeds when you're offline" is blurring the lines for offline editing. "This blurring of lines is only going to continue. We haven't figured out how to get content to desktops, how do we get it into web applications?"

John Blyberg responded to Coombs trends, saying that he sees academic libraries pursuing semantic web technologies, including developing ontologies. Coombs disagreed with this assessment, saying that "libraries have lots of badly-tagged HTML pages". Roy Tennant agreed, "If the semantic web arrives, buy yourself some ice skates, because hell will have frozen over".

Breeding said that he longs for services-oriented architecture (SOA) but "I'm not holding my breath". SOA can develop true information applications built from the start but current systems wrap around legacy systems. True Web 3.0 applications are a long way off. Walt Crawford replied, "Roy [Tennant] is right – most content providers don't provide enough detail, and they make easy things complicated and don't tackle the hard things". Coombs pointed out most users do not want to do what is necessary to populate XML documents that a semantic web requires. Coombs said "people are too concerned with what things look like", but Crawford interjected, "not too concerned".

Trends: "demise" of the catalog, "Software as a Service", Shakeups in ILS marketplace

Roy Tennant (www.libraryjournal. com/blog/1090000309.html), OCLC senior program manager, began his comments with a disclaimer that the panelists do not consider themselves experts but "lucky people who get to spout". Tennant listed his trends:

- Demise of the catalog, which should push the OPAC into the back room where it belongs, where it started it's life", and elevate discovery tools like Primo, Verde and Encore, as well as OCLC WorldCat Local, to help people find information. The tools can unify more information sources than just the online catalog. Tennant suggests we "kill the term OPAC".
- Software as a Service, formerly known as ASP and hosted services, which means librarians "don't have to babysit machines, and is a great thing for lots of librarians" and libraries can get out of the business of running software. Library vendors, SirsiDynix, and OCLC can support the software so libraries can use the systems that vendors support for them. The interface and configuration can be tailored to individual libraries and the benefits include software updates, transparency of service, and painless operation.
- Intense marketplace uncertainty due to the private equity buyouts of ExLibris and SirsiDynix and the rise of Evergreen and Koha looming open source options. Intense marketplace uncertainty aids a push towards open source systems. Tennant also said he sees "WorldCat Local as a disruptive influence". Aside from the ILS, the abstract and indexing (A&I) services are being bypassed as Google and OCLC are going direct to publishers to license content. Where do indexers fit in when someone like Google goes directly to the publishers and full text? Will Google, direct content access and internal cross linking of citations, make the business of creating an index irrelevant? Eventually, an ILS will be used mostly for back room maintenance, not front-end.

An audience member asked if libraries should get rid of local catalogs, and Tennant said "only when it fits local needs".

Trends: privacy issues, "slow library movement", library as publisher

Walt Crawford (http://walt.lishost. org/) spoke next and stood for the benefit of the people at the back of a

very large room. Crawford's attention on trends include:

- Privacy still matters. Crawford questioned if patrons really wanted libraries to turn into Amazon in an era of government data mining and inferences which could track a ten year patron borrowing pattern. Before libraries rush to emulate commercial services be sure people understand what that level of referral and personalized services means and if this is what people want. Intellectual freedom is key to democracy.
- The slow library movement (http://loomware.typepad.com/slowlibrary/), which argues that locality, where the library is part of the community, is vital to libraries, mindfulness matters, and open source software should be used "where it works". Crawford defines "mindfulness" as thinking about what you are doing and why. Pay attention to open source issues but use them in meaningful ways.
- The role of the public library as publisher where libraries are doing this with very small teams by helping local people get published. Crawford pointed out libraries in Charlotte-Mecklenberg County, Vermont libraries that work with Jessamyn West (www.librarian.net/), and Wyoming as farther along this path, and said the "tools are good enough that it's becoming practical". Walt described local publishing as a key role for libraries in the world of citizen content.

Blyberg commented on Crawford's presentation, saying systems "need to be more open to the data that we put in there" and there is room in the online catalog for more than MARC records. Williams said that content must be "disaggregatable and remixable, and Coombs pointed out the current difficulty of swapping out ILS modules, and said Electronic Resource Management (ERM) (www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6440577.html) was a huge issue. Tennant referenced the Talis platform (www.talis.com/), and said one of Evergreen's innovations is its use of the XMPP (Jabber) protocol (www.xmpp.org/), which is "easier than SOAP web services, which are too heavyweight".

Marshall Breeding responded to a question from the audience asking if MARC was dead, saying "I'm married to a cataloger, but we do need things in addition to MARC, which is good for books, like Dublin Core and ONIX". Coombs pointed out that MARCXML is a mess because it is retrofitted and does not leverage the power of XML. Crawford said, "I like to give Roy [Tennant] a hard time about his phrase "MARC is dead", and for a dying format, the Moen panel was full at 8 a.m". The 08:00 AM meeting from the previous day on MARC cataloging drew an audience that filled the room and had people standing out in the hall. "There's obviously still interest".

A questions from the audience asked what happens when the server goes down, and Blyberg responded, "What if your T-1 line goes down?" What happens if the electricity in the library goes out? Joan Frye Williams exhorted the audience to "examine your consciences when you ask vendors how to spend their time". Coombs agreed, saying that her experience on user groups had exposed her to "crazy competing needs that vendors are faced with – [they] are spread way too thin". Williams said there are natural transition points and she spoke darkly of a "pyramid scheme" and that you "get the vendors you deserve". Coombs agreed, saying, "Feature creep and managing expectations is a fiercely difficult job, and open source developers and support staff are different people".

Trends: behaviors; new menu of end-user focused technologies; grasping the full potential; learning from mistakes

Joan Frye Williams (www.jfwilliams.com/), information technology consultant, trends were not specifically about technology but about behavioral trends. The circular path of systems to run in cycles is part of the process for libraries to confront technologies where they are fit. Libraries can get caught in cycles of doing things in the same way but with new technologies.

- New menu of end-user focused technologies. Williams said she worked in libraries when the typewriter was replaced by an OCLC

machine, which did not change the workflow processes but "automated" them. Libraries are still not using technology strategically. "Technology is not a checklist", She talked about how she related this to her niece who uses a mobile as a phone, as a flashlight, as a camera, for texting, and so on while Joan still considers it just to be a phone. This is the difference between simply seeing a new technology and recognizing how it changes the possibilities. Williams chided, saying that the 23 Things (http://plcmcl2-about.blogspot.com/) movement of teaching new skills to library staff was insufficient since people where being motivated to just look at or try technology. Williams said you do not just have to try or spot a technology, you have to grasp its potential and that is threatening for many people. Williams also talked about how we have to remember not to implement a new technology and then abandon it. Do not stop once the new technology is implement but do more with it than turn it on and step back. Learn from the mistakes and the successes of your new technology and take it a bit further. Even though the technology scares some people, we need to be able to grasp its full potential. "We're toast if we don't grasp the full potential".

- Ability for libraries to assume development responsibility in concert with end users. Joan described comments from people she works with on the utility of online book sites, where half the people find the book site really cool and have a huge upside potential, but the other have saying "it's not a library/you know it's gonna break/I'm not sure we can guarantee quality". "Well hello, discovery has left the building, fulfillment is not far behind", Williams chided. Libraries are holding back from developing useful services by being afraid of irrelevance, which is self-fulfilling. "If the civilians don't need us will they still want us?"

- Have to make things more convenient, adopting artificial intelligence (AI) principles of self-organizing systems. Williams said,

"If computers can learn from their mistakes, why can't we?" We have a reluctance to be involved more directly in the development cycle.

Modify ourselves based on what we learn in real life. Currently there is an absence of feedback to intelligently evolve the system.

Questions from the audience to all panelists followed. An questioner asked why libraries are still using the ILS. Coombs said it is a financial issue, but Breeding responded sharply, "How can we not automate our libraries?" Walt Crawford agreed, "Are we going to return to index cards?" When the panel was asked if library home pages would disappear, Crawford and Blyberg both said they would be surprised. Williams said "the product of the [library] website is the user experience". She said Yorba Linda Public Library (CA) (www.ylpl.lib.ca.us/) is enhancing their site with a live book feed that updates "as books are checked in, a feed scrolls on the site". The panelists agreed nature of the library website as a place will change just like the physical library is changing. It will become more interactive and collaborative as mashups of library data increase and are used directly instead of visiting the library website. The library website will still be necessary.

When asked by an audience member asked why the panel did not cover toys and protocols, Crawford replied "outcomes matter", and Coombs agreed, saying "I'm a toy geek but it's the user that matters". Many participants talked about their use of Twitter (www.twitter.com/), and Coombs said portable applications on a USB drive have the potential to change public computing in libraries. Users' interaction with information is changing, and we are responding. This is where much of the current environment of change comes from. Tennant recommended viewing the Photosynth demo (www.ted.com/index.php/talks/view/id/129), first shown by Blaise Aguera y Arcas at the TED2007 (Technology, Entertainment, Design) conference (www.ted.com/). Finally, when asked how to keep up with trends, especially for new systems librarians, Coombs said, "It depends what kind of library you're working in. Find a network – ask questions on the code4lib (IRC) channel (www.code4lib.org/)". People asked for recommendation of how to keep aware of technology trends. Blyberg recommended constructing a "well-rounded blogroll" that includes sites from the humanities, sciences, and library and information science will help you be a well-rounded feed reader". Tennant recommended a "gasp – dead tree magazine, Business

2.0", Coombs said the commercial Gartner website (www.gartner.com/) has good information about technology adoptions and Williams recommended trendwatch.com (http://trendwatch.com/).

Links to other trends:

- *Karen Coombs' Top Technology Trends* (http://litablog.org/2007/06/20/karen-coombs-top-technology-trends/)
- *Meredith Farkas' Top Technology Trends* (http://litablog.org/2007/06/15/meredith-farkas-top-technology-trends/)
- *3 Trends and a Baby* (Jeremy Frumkin) (http://litablog.org/2007/06/24/466/)
- *Some Trends from the LiB* (Sarah Hougton-Jan) (http://litablog.org/2007/06/20/some-trends-from-the-lib/)
- *"Sum" Top Tech Trends for the Summer of 2007* (Eric Lease Morgan) (http://litablog.org/2007/06/15/sum-top-tech-trends-for-the-summer-of-2007/)

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