

Editorial

To Print, or Not



As the new editor of *College & Research Libraries* I have to wonder if it still makes sense to print this journal. As a librarian I have been counseling some of my constituents, particularly scholars in the sciences and professional fields, to move electronic, if they haven't already. Freed from the constraints of print publication, ideas can be shared more quickly, economically, and universally. Yet I like my print copy of *C&RL*, as I suspect many of you do. This small, manageably sized, print journal arrives in the mail regularly once every two months. It is about a hundred pages of text and charts with half a dozen articles and half a dozen book reviews. It is easy to carry around when I travel, and that is when I get a lot of my professional reading done. Is it just me and my generation—still part of a print culture—or is it that printed books and journals are a convenient and comfortable medium for reading that will remain with us for some time to come?

Predicting the future of print publication is a risky business. The death of print has been greatly exaggerated for at least the last two decades, but it is hard not to notice that change is occurring and the pace is quickening. Law, medicine, engineering, the sciences and some of the social sciences now share their journal scholarship primarily online. Only monographs and the journal literature in the humanities, arts, and popular writing seem to be holding out in print. But have you checked out your public library lately? Many of them have the latest novels, popular non-fiction, audio books, and videos ready for you to

download to your favorite viewing device for several weeks before they disappear from your screen—pretty convenient compared to checking out, lugging around, and returning books and recordings.

Of course, we are not really in an “either/or” situation. Digital and print can co-exist and even complement each other. Information today, with few exceptions such as fine printing, wants to be—needs to be—digital in production, in discovery, and in mass storage. Print remains an excellent format for reading and “making sense” of information, and we understand its strengths and weaknesses as a preservation medium. In this hybrid and shifting information realm, there are important research and operational questions for academic librarians about the right balance between print and digital, about what current media to acquire, and about how best to manage our massive legacy of print collections. I am particularly interested in this latter question and in answers that can provide effective strategies for the consolidated mass storage of print as we move to a more fully realized digital information system.

For the time being, we will hedge our bets at *C&RL*. We will continue to print our journal every other month. Maybe I will glimpse a serious librarian in an airport lobby or on a plane with his or her head buried in a print copy. Or light up your laptop, we are online too, so you can discover us and read us however you like.

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