



Always a River, Sometimes a Library

Rick Anderson Reexamines Library Practice and Patron Service

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Rick Anderson explores the three ways the library profession is broken, and the four ways to fix it. He uses the Mississippi River as a metaphor for patron behavior, and gives us new and useful ways to think about our patrons.

Program Overview

Why are we talking about this?

We need to foster a new mindset and become:

- Less religious and more skeptical
- Less idealistic and more pragmatic
- Less instructive and more helpful

Fundamental assumptions

- Things are not okay
- Fundamental change calls for fundamental change
- We're lecturing our patrons and missing opportunities

Three ways our profession is broken

- Too many rule-followers, not enough problem-solvers
- The "Teach a Man to Fish" fallacy
- Too much self-congratulation, too little progress

Four ways to fix it

- Question (not celebrate) our "core values"
- Give up on the educator function
- Stop talking to ourselves; start listening to patrons
- Abandon print

The Mississippi River as a Metaphor

Two strategies for dealing with a river:

- Adjustment
- Control

Only one strategy works: **Adjustment**

The river always wins. How is this a metaphor for libraries?

- Patrons are the river.
- Like water, they will follow the path of least resistance.
- Our ability to redirect them is limited in the short run and nonexistent in the long run.
- If we try the "control" strategy, they'll ultimately go where they want and we'll just get hurt.



The Three Terrible Questions

- What's the Internet got that we ain't got?
- When is good enough good enough?
- Why do we think we're so much smarter than our patrons?

Ways to think about patron behavior

- Efficiency is not laziness
- As a matter of fact, online IS better than print
- Don't try to think like a good librarian; try to think like a bad patron
- Google rules. Deal with it.

Strategies for adapting to patron behavior

- Three words: online, online, online
- Put inertia on your side
- Embrace risk; celebrate failure
- More fish; fewer peas
- Celebrate efficiency
- Focus on speed-to-stacks

Speaker Biography: Rick Anderson

Rick Anderson earned his B.S. and M.L.I.S. degrees at Brigham Young University. Before assuming his current position as Director of Resource Acquisition at the University of Nevada, Reno, he worked as a bibliographer for Yankee Book Peddler, Inc., as Head Acquisitions Librarian for the University of North Carolina, Greensboro and as Electronic Resources and Serials Coordinator at Nevada. He serves on the editorial boards of ACQNET, Serials and Library Collections, Acquisitions and Technical Services and edits the Sound Recording Reviews column for Notes (the quarterly journal of the Music Library Association). He writes a regular op-ed column for Against the Grain entitled "In My Humble (But Correct) Opinion.", and his book, *Buying and Contracting for Resources and Services: A How-to-Do-It Manual for Librarians* was published in 2004 by Neal-Schuman. In 2005, Rick was identified by Library Journal as a "Mover & Shaker" – one of the "50 people shaping the future of libraries."

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Resources

Annotated Bibliography

Anderson, Rick. "**The library is dead; long live the library: why everything is different now and what we can do about it.**" Presented as part of a MOLO videoconference, 1 October 2003; available at <http://www2.library.unr.edu/anderson/molospeech.htm>

"A revolution took place with the advent of the World Wide Web, a graphical interface that would eventually turn the Internet from a tool for nerds and academics into what has been called, by various writers, 'the largest and fastest growing medium in the world,' 'the largest and most widely used information system ever constructed,' and 'the richest and most complete source of study material available. That we librarians should see such a development as a threat is understandable.

It is a threat -- a threat to the traditional definition of a library, a threat to our usefulness as guides and instructors in the research process, and a threat to the coherence of copyright protections that provide incentives to authors and innovators in every field. So what will we do?"

Bibliographic Services Task Force, University of California Libraries. **Rethinking How We Provide Bibliographic Services for the University of California**, January, 2006; available at <http://libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/sopag/BSTF/Final.pdf>.

"Society is in the midst of learning how to "be" in the information age. The advent of computers and the inclusion of the Web in our work and private lives have pushed innovations and embraced information and access in ways we can hardly imagine. We are living in a complex and challenging digital landscape that changes constantly. On the Library front, our bibliographic systems have not kept pace with this changing Environment ... The current Library catalog is poorly designed for the tasks of finding, discovering, and selecting the growing set of resources available in our libraries. ... We offer a fragmented set of systems to search for published information (catalogs, A&I databases, full text journal sites, institutional repositories, etc) each with very different tools for identifying and obtaining materials. For the user, these distinctions are arbitrary."

Chad, Ken and Paul Miller. "**Do Libraries Matter?: The Rise of Library 2.0.**" White paper, November 2005; available at http://www.talis.com/downloads/white_papers/DoLibrariesMatter.pdf.

"The library's information provider crown is slipping. Justifiably or not, today libraries are increasingly viewed as outdated, with modern, Internet-based services, such as Amazon and Google, looking set to inherit the throne. Even so, at Talis, we believe that there is plenty of life left in the library yet. This survival demands change though. Inevitably, as the world advances, the library must also evolve and begin to deliver its services in the ways that its modern users expect. Library 2.0 is a concept of a very different library service that operates according to the expectations of today's library users. In this vision, the library makes information available wherever and whenever the user requires it."



Coffman, Steve. "**What if you ran your library like a bookstore?**"

American Libraries, March 1, 1998, Vol. 29, Issue 3.

"Let's stop pretending. If communities choose to manage their libraries like Barnes & Noble, they could get many of the amenities people find so attractive about the new superstores--great selection, convenient hours, comfortable surroundings, and friendly staff and for significantly less than they currently pay to operate a traditional library. Of course, the library might function a little differently than it does now. We would either need to limit the kinds of reference services and cataloging we offer or find better and less expensive ways of providing them. But, just how much are the differences between bookstores and today's libraries worth to our customers--those who have to foot the bill?"

Coffman, Steve. "**Building Earth's largest library: driving into the future.**" *Searcher*, March 1, 1999, Vol. 7, Issue 3.

"Perhaps it's a good thing then that Amazon doesn't lend books, as well as sell them, or we librarians might be in really big trouble."

Deiss, Kathryn J. "**Innovation and strategy: risk and choice in shaping user-centered libraries.**" *Library Trends*, v. 53, issue 1 (Summer 2004) p. 17-32.

"Innovation and strategic thinking are critical to any organization's future and have direct correlations to the organization's mission and purpose. ... Understanding customer readiness and need as well as patterns of behavior can afford perspectives on where, how, and when an innovation might suit an organization."

Deiss, Kathryn J. "**Innovation and strategy: risk and choice in shaping user-centered libraries.**" *Library Trends*, v. 53, issue 1 (Summer 2004) p. 17-32.

"Innovation and strategic thinking are critical to any organization's future and have direct correlations to the organization's mission and purpose. ... Understanding customer readiness and need as well as patterns of behavior can afford perspectives on where, how, and when an innovation might suit an organization."

Frey, Thomas. "**The Future of Libraries: Beginning the Great Transformation.**" White paper, 2005; available at <http://www.davinciinstitute.com/page.php?ID=120>.

"We have transitioned from a time where information was scarce and precious to today where information is vast and readily available, and in many cases, free. ...

We have put together ten key trends that are affecting the development of the next generation library. Rest assured that these are not the only trends, but ones that have been selected to give clear insight into the rapidly changing technologies and equally fast changing mindset of library patrons."

Lynch, Clifford. "**Where Do We Go from Here?: The Next Decade for Digital Libraries.**"

D-Lib Magazine, v. 11, issue 7/8 (July/August 2005); available at <http://www.dlib.org/dlib/july05/lynch/07lynch.html>.

"'Digital libraries': this oxymoronic phrase has attracted dreamers and engineers, visionaries and entrepreneurs, a diversity of social scientists, lawyers, scientists and technicians. And even, ironically, librarians – though some would argue that digital libraries have very little to do with libraries as institutions or the practice of librarianship."



Others would argue that the issue of the future of libraries as social, cultural and community institutions, along with related questions about the character and treatment of what we have come to call "intellectual property" in our society, form perhaps the most central of the core questions within the discipline of digital libraries – and that these questions are too important to be left to librarians, who should be seen as nothing more than one group among a broad array of stakeholders.”

Riemer, John. (2005). "Rethinking How We Provide Bibliographic Services for the University of California."

This 80 page report can be seen and downloaded at: <http://libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/sopag/BSTF/Final.pdf>
(Linda Slusar recommends printing the first 10 pages.)

Questions

1. What is the purpose of a library?
2. Why do I love working in a library?
3. What are we trying to help our patrons do?
4. Why would a patron use the library instead of Google?
5. Why would a patron use Google instead of the library?
6. All things considered, has Google made life better or worse?
7. What does Barnes & Noble do better than the library?
8. What’s the difference between improving a service and “dumbing it down”?

Additional Questions

1. What’s the best thing about the library?
2. What’s the most frustrating thing about the library?
3. If you could fix one thing about your library’s services, what would it be?
4. Finish this sentence: “Using the library should be more like...”
5. When you need to study, where do you go and why?

Notes
