Libraries and Google®

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Wherever librarians gather, brows furrow as the vexed question of Google is raised. Whilst its services are regarded with great favour by many users – and not a few librarians – the profession remains cautious and sceptical. Rightly so, because our training and experience should make us distrust any "one stop" solution to the complex problems of searching for information.

The topic of this collection of papers is interesting and highly relevant because it encapsulates many issues that managers of library services are confronting with funding agencies. We are living in changed circumstances where some of our deepest professional beliefs are being challenged: could it be that a university, for example, could design a campus without including a library? This is rumoured to have happened in the United States and we are probably all aware of comments within the communities we serve, calling into question the need for our services in the "Google Age".

William Miller introduces the volume with a thoughtful overview of its contents. For this reviewer, the most provoking point he makes is that Google declined the opportunity to add a paper: "We have to face the fact that libraries are small potatoes in the Google universe. It will not accommodate itself to us; we will have to come to terms with it" (p. 4). My hackles are raised by this, especially as one recalls the hubris of the recent "dot.commers" with their confident predictions. I do not think we should abandon the insights that research on information-seeking has had to offer just yet. He goes on to comment, very sensibly, that we do need to explore and understand the Google phenomenon: whilst Google is not "the enemy", it is too soon to embrace it without question.

Mark Sandler continues this theme with a brief history of Google's digitisation project, aiming to identify the reasons for the project and the responses and motivations of those libraries entering into partnership with it and those who are waiting to see what happens. A disturbing factor is that few partner libraries have made the contractual details of the arrangements public – thus, it is difficult to assess the implications and to consider appropriate responses. In a telling phrase he captures the essence of one of the problems: "Google is all about scale, not tailored services. They are the Wal-

Mart of information providers – there is something for everyone, but you have to walk up and down a lot of aisles to find your item" (p. 11). Never has the corner shop seemed more attractive!

One of the main partner libraries is the Bodleian Library of the University of Oxford. Ronald Milne describes its contact with Google and the impact of the Google Library Project, which was announced on 14 December 2004, as consisting of the "Google Five": the libraries of the universities of Harvard, Michigan, Oxford, Stanford and the New York Public Library. He acknowledges that the process of digitisation is "on an industrial scale" (p. 27) and that many issues of data quality and bibliographic processing have emerged.

By this point in the volume, the unease of many readers will have taken shape: in a "Google-ised" world, is there any need for libraries, librarians and all that we regard as being significant in our domain? Rick Anderson spells out the issues clearly and in measured tones. He is not alarmist and he, very properly, warns that "head in the sand-ism" is as unhelpful as uncritical enthusiasm. At the same time, he offers a dose of realism: "…it is quickly becoming less and less true that libraries offer more high-quality content than the open Web does" (p. 35). Mark Herring continues this debate by considering the limitations and defects of electronic access. One of the phrases to treasure is his coinage of "Webgasmic readers", to describe those already under the thrall of all things electronic.

Mary Taylor brings us back to base with a case study at the University of Nevada, Reno, of the trial use of one of Google's commercial applications: the Google Search Appliance (GSA). The utility of the GSA is considered, together with its less visible impacts on human resources and infrastructure. The conclusion is that "a better understanding of the technologies underneath it" is required before it can be deployed.

Google Print and Google Scholar are considered by Robert Lackie. The history of both is outlined prior to a discussion of their impacts on library and information services. Both are controversial, and Lackie is quick to point out that the "track record" is short and certainly insufficient for forming any balanced view, but that this should not stop us expressing our professional concerns, or exploring the applications to see what it is they can do well. Burton Callicott and Debbie Vaughn mention that Scholar has been re-named as "Schoogle" in some circles; for this reviewer, this encouraged some harmless therapy in developing similar amusing contractions! Their paper provides the results of a test of Google Scholar against other bibliographic resources – the conclusion was that Scholar provided useful supplementation, but did not offer a performance to equal that of an array of searching tools.

The "invisible" or "deep" web is what has the search engine providers worried. One of the strongest arguments in favour of our profession is the need for people who are professionally concerned with information *per se* and can guide people to the very resources that are hidden from most general-purpose search engines. The importance of this is discussed by Francine Egger-Sider and Jane Devine. The "gatekeeper" role of libraries, and librarians, is considered next, by Shelley Phipps and Krisellen Maloney. Their conclusion is that the "gatekeeper" role is too restricted as a definition of our professional potential. In the following paper, Maurice York reviews the impact of Scholar, and also concludes that the professional roles need to expand so that "field librarians" work alongside researchers and become indispensable experts on Internet searching. Does this stir vague memories of the roles of information specialists that we debated in the '60s?

It is already clear that Google Scholar is an interesting, but somewhat untested, application: this view is confirmed by Janice Adlington and Chris Benda in their review of its use in reference work. Rebecca Donlan and Rachel Cooke express similar caution as a result of their review of its use in accessing full-text holdings.

Mike Thelwall suggests that Google can be used to advantage in leading students to good sources of basic topic knowledge, as a preliminary to conducting more focussed literature searching in depth. This paper serves a useful purpose in "positioning" Google among the array of conventional search tools: it is neither omnicompetent nor to be ignored, but experimentation is needed to confirm the purposes for which this tool is best suited. In a similar vein, Rachael Cathcart and Amanda Roberts consider the contribution of Google Scholar to information literacy, and Alan Dawson considers how best librarians can ensure that the web-accessible resources of their libraries can be easily found with Google. He includes good examples of the use of metadata for this purpose.

The potential for invasion of privacy is inherent in many aspects of the Internet and Google is, perhaps surprisingly, a tool that *could* be used – though Paul Piper hastens to assure the reader that there is no evidence of its abuse of the personal data that is collected whenever a search is conducted: as a minimum, Google retains indefinitely the IP address of any computer used for searching, the date and time of the search, the search terms used and the browser configuration. Whilst Google is open in declaring that this information is gathered, it is less clear as to how it is used. "Service improvement" is cited – but the potential for harmful use is there and it should continue to worry us. Ron Force follows on with a discussion of the Google "brand" and ends by emphasising a point that is often overlooked: although Google is "free", it generates almost all of its income through search advertising. Thus "enhancements" may not necessarily be to the benefit of the searcher – they may be directed at maximising the opportunities for earning advertising revenue.

Krasulski and Bell conclude the discussions with a "competitive" strategy: how to keep informed about developments in Google with a range of comment and critique from several sources. They review a range of web sites, blogs and other sources that discuss and evaluate the Google phenomenon.

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