

Report from ALA Annual Conference 2007

Lincoln Trail Libraries System
July 16, 2007

Amanda McKay

Saturday, June 23

“Leading Technology Driven Change”

One of the speakers talked about something he called “The Power of Full Engagement.” There are three steps in this process: Define your purpose, Face the truth, and Take action. To me, the most useful piece of information was in the Face the Truth section. He talked about how staff and outsiders do have valid concerns as the source of their resistance to change. In order to face the truth, a leader has to be prepared to respond to these and take action. One of the best ways to do this is to seek out the mavericks (the people who work hard, but are the most resistant to change and the most capable of undermining your work) and incorporate them into your plan early. Funniest quote from this session: “We are moving this profession one funeral at a time!”

“Word of Mouth Marketing is Everyone’s Job”

Speakers: Peggy Barber and Pam Jaskot

Peggy encouraged participants to think of creative ways to build client relationships, such as reference by appointment. Peggy also reminded participants that word of mouth marketing is not spontaneous. It needs to be developed through a process involving research, planning, communication, and evaluation. In the planning phase, she stressed the need to be organized, focused, and consistent. She said it is better to have one consistent, easy to remember and follow marketing statement that almost never changes because clients will remember it more. She provided examples such as “Just do it,” “When it rains, it pours,” etc. Her final point was to focus on the people, not the stuff provided. She encouraged people to not produce materials with lists of “stuff;” instead, she encouraged marketers to think about the impact the stuff has on the people.

“Can Blogs Be Trusted?”

I have to confess that much of this discussion was over my head as it focused primarily on the role of blogs in politics during the past few election cycles. A reporter from *The New Republic* spoke about his company’s blog, *The Plank*. He also discussed the rising role of the liberal blogosphere in shaping and honing messages, similar to what conservatives have been doing for years. There is an invitation-only listserv called *The Townhouse* that serves as the main method for organizing these types of responses. He also briefly mentioned *Talking Points Memo* as a good source of information.

Sunday, June 24

“PR for the New Millennium: 10 Cool Technologies”

Speaker: Stephen Abrams

Stephen encouraged participants to think about how users will feel using the items in the library and not focusing on the stuff that is available. Like Peggy, he discouraged participants from creating long lists of “stuff” that can be found in the library. He wanted librarians to find ways of connecting with users, rather than alienating them. One suggestion was to provide a place to keep young adults’ skateboards. Many libraries prohibit skate boarding, but that is the main mode of transport for a lot of kids. However, once they get there, they have nowhere to safely store their boards. Provide a bin by the circulation desk so that they can leave them in there and the young adults might feel more

welcome in the library. His picks for the top 10 technologies to use to get the message out are as follows: YouTube, Second Life, MySpace, Facebook, Flickr, Podcasts, Wikipedia (check out PB Wiki), Ning, Twitter, and Mozes.

Other Programs

“Training Showcase”

“Innovative Public Library Services Around the Globe”

“Providing Transition Services to Inmates”

“Wiking the Blog and Walking the Dog”

Michelle Ralston

It was my first time attending ALA. I attended a session for new conference attendees that was very helpful. The Exhibits Hall was pretty overwhelming. I wandered around and found the big names like Google, but wasn't looking for anything specific. There are rows and rows of booths, each booth promoting sales of services or book or other library related materials. I saw publishing companies that I recognized and companies that I am still not sure what they do. My favorite thing to look at was all the different library furniture. I think my plan for next year is to first research different companies that might offer services that would be useful to LTLS before I leave and then check them out once I am at the conference.

I went to two different technology focused sessions: One was the top 10 technologies to help with PR, and the other was about wikis, blogs, and second life. What I have noticed is that all the technologies that are being focused on are of a social network. Social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace are ruling supreme, and it isn't just with the teens anymore. If libraries want to market to and draw in people who aren't necessarily coming into the library, these social networking tools are the way to do it. I know that we have a MySpace account. Do we have a Facebook account? I use to wonder about the longevity of these social networking sites, but it seems that they are here to stay. I believe we should make the most of them.

The auditorium series was filled with great authors. I attended two: Patricia Cornwell was a last minute speaker when another author canceled. She did not get up on the podium and talk for two hours. She took a different approach. Instead, she introduced herself and asked if we could have a conversation. She asked questions to the librarians, and we answered, and we got to ask her questions. As she answered, she told stories and explained her writing process. It was a very refreshing approach. I enjoyed listening to the interaction between writer and reader.

Judy Blume is charming and emotional. She warned us early in her talk that she would probably cry and she had her tissues ready. Judy told us parts of her life story, and her struggle with writing. She explained how hard the writing process was and how much she loved it. She talked about her family and her characters, and it was mesmerizing.

I spent a lot of time preparing for and promoting PolyTalk. PolyTalk was present at two different ALA events: The Diversity Fair and the Library Day on the Hill. It was a great time to show how PolyTalk has grown and invite other states to join. I did a lot of networking and made some great contacts for the future of PolyTalk

Pat Boze

The Washington, D.C. location for ALA's Annual Conference is a perfect setting for reflecting on the history of our country as well as where we are going. The many monuments in the nation's capitol seem so extraordinary to those of us who don't see them everyday, and at this time of year it's gratifying to see huge masses of people touring and photographing them. However, in contrast to these are the security perimeters that are in

place now around both the White House and the Vice President's house. It's a reminder of changes in the country since 9/11.

For me, much of this year's conference focused on automation issues and our participation with the WorldCat Local pilot project. Attending sessions on open source software projects, hearing panel discussions with automation vendors who discuss where their companies are heading, and going to other sessions where technology trends are discussed filled most of the time. The buzz in program sessions and the exhibit hall indicated that recent changes in the automation vendor landscape (mergers and consolidations, buyouts by equity firms, etc.) have created a lot of uncertainty for librarians about what might happen next. Armed with our brochure for the upcoming 'Future of the ILS' workshop in September, we received very positive comments on 'how needed something like this is'.

OCLC featured WorldCat Local at several of its major sessions. It is rewarding to be involved with a project that is drawing national attention and interest from all types of librarians.

Joe Sciacca

The FISA Court

The operation of the government's highly secret FISA (Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act) Court was the topic of a program sponsored by the ALA Washington Office. Judge Royce Lambert, a former Chief Judge of the FISA Court, gave insights into how the court operates. The impact of PATRIOT Act and the FISA Court on libraries has been widely discussed and there are concerns that the privacy of library patron records may be compromised. One important part of the structure of the court is that FISA Court judges serve non-renewable terms and cannot be reappointed to the Court. This helps to keep the Court independent of the FBI and Justice Department. Judge Lambert stated that he and other FISA Court judges considered all requests for FISA warrants carefully and did not blindly rubber stamp all FBI requests. He stated that FISA warrants issued immediately after the September 11 attacks were instrumental in the rapid identification of all the hijackers. In discussing the gag order that prevents those served with FISA warrants from disclosing that they have been served, he stated that the 2006 amendments to allow those served with FISA warrants to speak to their own lawyers are an example that the concerns of librarians and others are heeded. Lambert believes that we may be in a war that will never end during our lifetime and that the need for government to be able to gather intelligence secretly is an important tool in fighting terrorism. However, that does not mean that we must abandon our concern for privacy and due process. We are best served if the court is run by independent judges who have a concern for the balance between fighting terrorism and protecting civil liberties.

PolyTalk Activities

PolyTalk was very active at the ALA Annual Conference this year. Joe Sciacca and Michelle Ralston presented a PolyTalk exhibit as part of the ALA Diversity Fair. LTLS also was selected to participate in the ALA Washington Office Library Day on the Hill where we presented a PolyTalk display in the Rayburn House Office Building. Fourteen exemplary library programs nationwide were selected to participate from over 100 nominations. The high point of the conference was the announcement that LTLS had won the 2007 SirsiDynix Building Better Communities Award. The award is open to libraries worldwide and includes a \$10,000 cash prize. SirsiDynix made 6 awards recognizing libraries using technology in innovative ways.

RFID Debate

The debate over privacy issues surrounding RFID technology is still not settled. At the LITA Top 10 Technology Trends program, speakers disagreed on whether RFID posed a significant threat to library patron confidentiality. The core argument for the idea that RFID is not a threat is that RFID tags do not store any data that can connect library materials to specific patrons. RFID tags for library materials only store information about the items. The key argument for the idea that RFID technology is a threat to privacy deals with implementations where library patron cards as well as materials carry RFID tags. The argument is that

when both patron cards and library materials are tagged, it becomes possible for an unauthorized tag reader to capture tags from the patron card and the items being checked out at the same time, thus making the connection between the patron and the materials. RFID tags can be read only at very short distances, however those arguing that this is a potential threat point out that someone with an RFID reader could capture tag information by standing near a library entrance.

Interoperability and De-Coupling the OPAC

The de-coupling of the OPAC (Online Public Access Catalog) from the ILS (Integrated Library System) is a trend that is intensifying. New library portal products such as Encore and Primo, WorldCat Local from OCLC, and open source products such as Evergreen and Koha are disrupting the status quo and giving libraries a new way to think about acquiring and combining online services. The library automation model we are familiar with over the past decades has been that libraries obtain their automation services from one ILS vendor whose flagship products include all the desired modules and functionality. Under this model, for example, the circulation module and public access catalog are 2 components offered by the library's ILS vendor. Recent developments are beginning to challenge this monolithic approach to online services. Libraries now have the ability to use one product for internal operations (cataloging, circulation, etc.) and a different product for the OPAC. This trend has some obvious advantages for libraries. Rather than select one vendor for all modules, the library can select the specific products that meet their needs and have the most desired features and combine them. We are in the early days of this trend, and the integrated ILS marketplace is still quite robust, however libraries are beginning to challenge the status quo and actively look at alternatives. One example is the idea that libraries that use different internal automation platforms can cooperate on a large scale to have a standardized OPAC. Interoperability is the key factor, ensuring that a component developed by Vendor X will work with other components developed by Vendor Y. In the past, if asked who the library's automation vendor was, the most likely response would be to name one vendor. If the current trend continues, in the future, the library is more likely to say their circulation control system is from Vendor X and their OPAC is from Vendor Y.

Users as Content Contributors

Social networking web sites are changing user expectations. Not content to be mere recipients of web-based content created and delivered remotely, users now expect to become part of their web experience and to add their own content. Web sites that do this effectively attract more users. What are the implications of this trend for library online catalogs? The user experience would be greatly enhanced if library catalogs offered a way for users to enter their own reviews, or to tag items using their own subject terms. The catalog would become a community creation. There is a strong sense that the library catalog marketplace is falling behind when compared to the social networking features on the web. Some libraries are developing additional add-on functionality on their own, however for widespread adoption library vendors must build this functionality into their standard products. Experimental user tagging has been implemented by Ann Arbor District Library (www.aadl.org) where users tag catalog records that display as notes on an image of a traditional library card. The top user tags are "fantasy", "manga", and "anime". Tag information can be used by library staff for collection development and to measure reader interests.

Play "Spot the Technology"

A new skill that will become more important for librarians is being able to spot new technologies, or new uses of existing technologies, and grasp the potential for incorporating it into the mission of the library. Not every new technology may have an application for the library. At the same time, we cannot ignore new technologies because we risk becoming increasingly disconnected from our user base. This is a disruptive threat to libraries.

Jan Ison

As a veteran of more than 20 ALA conferences, I found the DC Conference very stimulating and full of exciting programs. The following "snippets" represent ideas for me to think about for library service in East Central Illinois.

Do Libraries Innovate?

This program had some of the best and brightest librarians discussing about innovations in libraries. Some of the questions and comments that are important for LTLS to consider are as follows?

- Are libraries risk averse?
- Librarians like to share our successes but never our disasters. We could learn a lot from the disasters.
- The age of a librarian is not an indicator of an innovator.
- We shouldn't be afraid to fail but we should try to fail wisely (learn from our mistakes) (an example was that Apple has failed wisely).
- One panelist felt that the only organization that has the ability to innovate is the big "O." (OCLC)
- Librarians don't do enough research about our communities.
- Librarians don't let go of the old very easily.
- "If we are what we were – we won't be."
- If librarians are to remain what they are, they must change.

Technology Issues

The following are some things to think about based on several sessions including Technology for Trustees and Ambient Findability.

- RFP Process needs to be evaluated – it is old and monolithic. All ILS systems do the same thing. Too expensive to do RFP's the same way we have done them and it is not productive.
- Does the library's Internet policy for library owned computers carry over to personal owned computers for people who use the library's wireless connection?
- The core of the ILS product was completed by 2000 and most functionality is not really new.
- Don't buy from "Jim Bob's" local computer shop.
- Don't buy computers that are barely adequate for current needs.
- For technology development trends read something besides library periodicals. Think about what is discussed in Time, Newsweek, and Business Week, etc. and see how what is trendy fits libraries.
- Need to stop having one foot in the past and one foot in the future if we are going to succeed as librarians.
- Keyword searching will be around for a long time.
- Need a variety of different public interfaces to meet the demands of our various users.

Marian Wright Edleman

Ms Edleman was the Presidents speaker for the School Librarians Association program. She is a tireless advocate for children and is the founder and President of the Children's Defense Fund. Much of what she said had me thinking about how well we serve children and teens in our libraries in LTLS. Some of her comments –

- Library is a community gathering place.
- Need to welcome all children.
- Need to be open at times that our children can use the library.
- What's wrong with Children? Adults.
- There are 13 million poor children in the US.
- Need to think about the cradle to prison pipeline and what role libraries can play in helping to arrest this problem. Once children/teens get in the criminal justices system it is hard to change course.
- She challenges us to teach all children to read by the 4th grade.
- We are criminalizing children at a younger and your ages.

Garrison Keillor

Garrison Keillor was the closing speaker. His speech focused on the library as a place - the traditional library. Some thoughts from Keillor

- Library is a “cathedral of quietness.”
- People read books to gain more than 1 life.
- Growing up you are aware of how much you do is a performance for adults (parents, coaches etc). Librarians didn’t do that, they simply presided over the order.
- Need a quiet room to gather our thoughts and to be able to unwind. It is a rare privilege in our time to sit and think.
- Beauty of libraries is to be able to read what we want whatever order we want.