

Cataloging, Discovery and PCC's Future

I'm going to be as progressive as I can be in presenting my vision of the future in this brief essay. I hope my characterization of the environment as it could be ten years from now will prove to be provocative and help us stretch our goals.

Background

Just a few weeks ago, a representative from one of the book vendors told me that the company has been put on notice by publishers that the business operations, (ordering, invoicing and shipping information), will be completely paperless in two years. Book agents will need to ready themselves to do business with publishers electronically. We all know that the standards that facilitate the electronic exchange of the business data are already in place, and they are continuing to evolve to encompass information beyond basic product information. As the standard for book information exchange matures, it is likely that all of our mainstream publishers will include information about the book, such as contents, book reviews and even such information as other works/authors cited in this electronic metadata exchange 'package.' Not only will these packages have the business data we need to acquire the material, but they will be rich in information that may be used for discovery.

Of course, not all sources of library materials will be accompanied by these electronic metadata packages. Libraries will continue to acquire materials needed for their collections as they do now, purchasing or harvesting information from sources that have little or no accompanying electronic metadata.

Developing in parallel with the publisher's electronic metadata packages are our own discovery tools. Ten years from now, Google Scholar and other discovery tools that are emerging now will seem crude and primitive. By 2015, more sophisticated discovery tools that are capable of using much more complicated mechanisms to create context and identify relationships will be used. These tools or search engines may sit on top of a library's own database(s), or may span a number of in house and remote systems. The ILS will have become a database in which to store acquisition, licensing agreements, and other local information needed to keep track of the holdings acquired for the library's community.

Human intervention in the preparation of metadata for use will be greatly changed and vastly diminished within libraries. Batch loading of metadata from publishers will foster the creation of mechanisms for data integrity and "piece tracking" for both the tangible and the electronic acquisitions. The skill sets of catalogers will evolve from a rule based set to a deeper understanding of how to metadata may be exploited by search engines and providing valuable information in the development of discovery tools. Cataloging records for materials will be created only when electronic metadata packages are not available.

The Role of the PCC

This scenario will have a great affect on the daily work of a cataloger, but I am not so certain that it will vastly change the role of the PCC. Cataloger's duties will shift to assisting with the development of quality assurance tools and workflows, being a part of the development of metadata harvesting tools, and, of course, creating metadata when there is none available. In addition, cataloger's skills are likely to be employed in digitization programs and the creation of metadata that goes along with such programs.

As for the PCC, it will need to remain active in influencing the development of standards. This role is crucial in facilitating the development of an underlying structure for metadata that will make the most of flexible search engines. Standards will be needed in our efforts to harvest, derive and cross walk metadata.

Commercial technological developments to improve the search experience are emerging rapidly. Discovery tool developers could benefit from a collaboration between an organization such as PCC in the design and development of their products. System designers have thus far been very good at indexing words from metadata or full text, and, they have developed result set based on popularity. But they have not yet mastered relevancy, collocation of like materials, or made use of authoritative headings. These concepts are ones that PCC could bring to the table

Training will also continue to be a significant role. As the work of cataloging expands beyond understanding cataloging rules, continuing education to assist individuals in building their skill sets will be needed.

And of course, the mission of creating records to be shared will not go away, but will not be the primary goal of the organization. Libraries will acquire materials from sources that do not provide metadata and some will have to be created. It may be derived from existing records, harvested from an electronic source, or it may created according to a set of cataloging rules.

In its strategic planning, it is important that PCC consider how our world is changing and what efforts are necessary to assist in the continued development of resource discovery. I will end this short essay with the following questions:

- Should PCC expand the types of groups with which it works on standards development?
- Should PCC begin to broaden the role of the cataloger in today's environment? What type of training does the cataloger need to be fully equipped to face the challenges of the future? Should the program be organized in such a way so that the training provided in library schools can be influence?
- How can the PCC become a partner in the design and development of discovery tools?

