



LIBRARY DIRECTOR SUMMIT ON THE FUTURE OF CATALOGING

MAY 26, 2010

Summary by: Arnold Hirshon, LYRASIS Chief Strategist and Executive Consultant

On May 26, 2010, LYRASIS convened a Summit Meeting in Atlanta with some of our leading academic library directors to discuss issues of strategic importance regarding the future of the library catalog and of the cataloging process. This paper summarizes the comments of the group and some potential actions LYRASIS might take to move these ideas forward. In addition to Kate Nevins (LYRASIS Chief Executive Officer) and Arnold Hirshon (LYRASIS Chief Strategist and Executive Consultant), the following library directors in attendance:

- Bonnie MacEwan (Dean of Libraries, Auburn University)
- Sarah Michalak (University Librarian, University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill)
- Frances O'Brien (Dean of Libraries, West Virginia University)
- Carrie Rampp (Director of Library Services, Bucknell University)
- Judy Russell (Dean of University Libraries, University of Florida)
- Joyce Rumery (Dean of Libraries, University of Maine – Orono)
- John Ulmschneider (University Librarian, Virginia Commonwealth University)
- Bruce Witham (Dean of Libraries, Rowan University).

WHAT STILL NEEDS TO BE CATALOGED?

- Core materials. Cataloging records for basic English-language monographs are commodity items. Many libraries already outsource much of this work through vendor-supplied, shelf-ready cataloging (e.g., PromptCat, YBP). As records have become commodities, libraries question why they still paying premium prices, especially when many records are available and shared freely on the web via Z39.50.
- Metadata creation. Metadata is required for materials that are uniquely held and digitized by the library (e.g., special collections materials). Library staff are already being heavily redirected to this activity.
- Unexposed (or under-exposed) collections. Government documents and foreign language monographs are not unique, but are often not discoverable because no record exists in the catalog. Libraries need a cooperative regional or national effort to coordinate the work of cataloging staff at participating libraries.
- Inventory stewardship. As stewards of physical collections, libraries need the catalog to provide inventory control for tangible materials owned and housed by the library (both print and audiovisual media). Although the use of the catalog as a discovery tool is diminishing, the inventory for stewardship role remains.
- Record enhancement. There was some disagreement whether the effort to enhance cataloging records (e.g., adding MeSH headings to cataloging records) still adds significant value. In general, libraries should accept "good enough" records and stop investing energies toward "record perfection."

HOW CAN LIBRARIES REDUCE THEIR CATALOGING COSTS?

- Many directors realized they do not have even basic information as to where their cataloging is generated, their current cataloging costs, or what opportunities exist to reduce their costs. Libraries should have available comparative and benchmarking data on the cost per transaction (and/or other industry standard measure, such as cost per fte) for their cataloging. As stewards of university or taxpayer money, it behooves libraries to explore their options to ensure they are getting the best value for the dollar. Members noted that they would like LYRASIS to provide a service that enabled quick calculation and comparison of their costs, and to recommend potential ways to reduce those costs.
- Libraries are dismayed that the current subscription pricing model for cataloging records has resulted in a virtually-immovable baseline cost. The problem is comparable to what they are facing with high-cost e-journal subscriptions. There is also a concern that the formulas used to calculate cataloging subscription costs are not sufficiently transparent to enable them to negotiate a change in their cost.
- Further cost reduction might be achieved through collaborative cataloging. This could be accomplished, for example, by centralizing cataloging operations, by doing more things on a regional or statewide basis, or by sharing of cost of cataloging specialized materials (e.g., for foreign language items).

WHAT IS THE CONTINUING VALUE OF THE CATALOG?

- Libraries have begun to separate the value of the cataloging record as metadata from the catalog as a primary tool of discovery. The traditional library catalog as the discovery tool is decreasingly important.
- The value of the traditional “global union catalog” has begun to erode. While the union catalog function was important in a print-based environment, it is no longer the key resource it once was in the book-dominated world. Once the metadata is available and harvestable, it does not necessarily have to be housed in and served from one central repository to make the content accessible.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP OF CATALOGING TO RESOURCE SHARING?

- A key reason to generate cataloging records is to enable resource sharing. In fact, some libraries are legally obligated to participate in resource sharing. As such, the decision of where to acquire the cataloging record can become intertwined with the resource sharing system. This can be a political reality, but it can nonetheless be seen as a frustrating constraint upon local decision making.
- A key question for each library is the percentage of its resource sharing – borrowing and lending – that is or can be fulfilled within a local, regional or statewide consortial group, and what percentage must escalate to the national/global system. Additional benchmarking data would be very helpful for local decisionmaking.
- Those institutions that participate in consortial groups that have their own resource sharing systems find that those systems usually serve effectively as the first point of request. In such cases, the availability of a national/global system to place requests becomes less significant (but not necessarily unimportant). However, where such consortial systems are not in place, the national/global system becomes the primary system and is of greater importance. LYRASIS was encouraged to consider providing a regional system for those regions or states that do not already have one.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE FOR CATALOGING STAFF?

- The long-term need for catalogers is still being defined. A whole generation of catalogers is at retirement age. Some describe themselves as “depressed” because they believe they will never be replaced, that this is “the end of our profession,” and libraries are “undoing their life’s work.” Nonetheless, one library reported that recently it had intentionally hired two new catalogers because it believes it is still valuable to have a cataloging-articulate perspective and voice within the library. The new librarians hired to fill this role are described as being more tuned into how to bring the users in to interact with the catalog and have a more external (user-centered) viewpoint than previous generations.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE CONCERNING CATALOGING OF LOCAL DIGITIZED COLLECTIONS?

- Digital Collection Impact Factors. As libraries accelerate the digitization and metadata descriptions of their local collections, they must justify the expense and to measure the value of those collections to researchers outside of the local institution. Libraries gave strong support for the idea to develop a scholarly “impact factor” that measures the value and return on investment of digital collections. Such a factor may require data to be embedded within the metadata for these collections. Libraries asked LYRASIS to take a leadership position to work with members to develop an impact factors, and to work with members.
- Digital Library Discovery Path. Libraries question what is the primary entry point for locating digital collections, and whether the library catalog or even global union catalogs is really the most significant part of that discovery path. Are these collections discovered through Google, the local catalog, WorldCat, a consortial gateway, or some other system? Better methods for data collection on usage are needed so that these activities can be employed as standard library assessment and accreditation data.

Recommendations: What Can LYRASIS Do To Help?

- **Benchmark.** Provide comparative data for cataloging, resource sharing and access subscriptions to benchmark local library costs against those of other libraries in their consortium or states.
- **Calculate.** Create tip sheets to: (1) make it easy for libraries to calculate their current staffing and out-of-pocket costs for cataloging, (2) explore workflow changes that could reduce their costs, and (3) compare their costs if the library was to employ a different vendor alternative.
- **Protect.** Ensure that the cataloging records libraries create remain in the public domain for the public good. For example, LYRASIS might encourage libraries to append a Creative Commons copyright statement on all original cataloging records the library contributes to the OCLC database.
- **Assess.** Work with libraries to create digital library collection impact factors.
- **Facilitate.** Coordinate cooperative cataloging efforts to minimize cataloging costs, e.g., for government documents.
- **Share.** For libraries, regions or states without resource sharing systems, consider whether to provide such a system, and ensure easy and effective interfaces to other existing systems.