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Pelikan's Antidisambiguation-Living in the Past

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Conclusions

Changing systems is a large undertaking with lasting effects on library services and operations. One big challenge with any migration is incorporating the pre-existing and the new: Activities necessary for implementing a new system include, for example, learning and applying new system functions, identifying and pursuing needed but not-yet-developed functions, and post-migration work which can include extensive data cleanup. At the same time, the library's pre-existing operations and services must continue with accuracy and timeliness. After nearly two years with our new system, many routine collection management areas have been normalized to the new ILS, but other tasks have not found a new framework owing to still-outstanding system developments. The vendor's abundant live and pre-recorded online training is a goldmine for learning about new features, learning new tasks, or simply refreshing one's knowledge of the modules' many features. Our new ILS vendor is accessible and the user community openly and enthusiastically shares solutions. On one hand, system migrations can invite comparisons between the old and the new. On the other hand, ILS migrations also provide opportunity to update workflows and embark on desired projects previously impossible within staffing and system-function constraints. ILS migrations also provide many skill-stretching opportunities.

Insights

For libraries considering a move to a new system, here are seven beneficial guideposts:

1. Due diligence: When selecting a new library system or services platform, it is important to assess how well the system or services platform and its user interfaces support the library's services and operations and system interoperability needed for consortium participation, both by consulting available information sources and by ascertaining the needs of library user groups.

2. Selection and future-orientation: Selection and evaluation should take into account the library's current and evolving operational needs, as well as information gleaned from due diligence fact-finding.

3. Decisionmaking: Collaborative approaches increase the range of needs factored into the selection, while top-down unilateral decisions can overlook key factors and thereby lead to productivity losses stemming from incomplete system capabilities.

4. Communication and support: Managing expectations and empathy for uncertainties help staff users see long-term benefit beyond the changes. Information should be shared early and continually.

5. Data migration and contingency plans: It is crucial to ascertain whether all the data needed for operations will migrate. Special attention should be given to post-migration contingency solutions to remedy migration gaps, and these should be specified in the contract.

6. Preparation and data deep dive: Thorough examination of data structures and system capabilities will ensure successful data mapping and conversion between the old and new systems. A rigorous contingency plan, as outlined above, is important for addressing data anomalies encountered in the migration.

7. Training: Rigorous and continual training promotes self-efficacy and confidence.

For Further Reading

Breeding, Marshall (2015). Selection and procurement strategies. *Library Technology Reports*, vol.51:issue 4, p.20-21.

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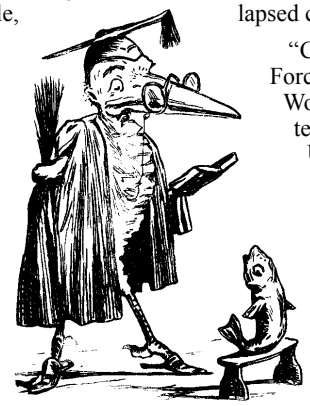
Pelikan's Antidisambiguation — Living in the Past

Column Editor: **Michael P. Pelikan** (Penn State) <mpp10@psu.edu>

I was thinking back recently to my old library school instructor in a class entitled "The History of the Book." He was one of those persons who had a doctoral-level degree in addition to a Master's level Library degree, in his case, a JD. In his classroom delivery he often would salt his presentations, perhaps unconsciously, with legal phrasings and constructions. For example, the modern paperback book had evolved, he said, into a construction that was "reasonably sturdy, when handled with reasonable care."



This was of course an instance of the legal construction of the "reasonable person." This is used to capture and express what can be expected in terms of care, skill, or judgement from the "average" person. The reasonable person would not attempt to operate a handheld hair dryer whilst standing under a running shower, nor expect that the blade of a power saw might not be sharp enough to damage skin, nor expect that a cup of coffee won't be hot enough to warrant care to avoid scalding. The lengthy lists of cautionary imperatives accompanying any device or appliance, sometimes affixed to said appliances in the form of durable plastic tags that defy removal (as a reasonable person might wish to do) provide vivid testimony to the consequences of lapsed common sense.

"Caution: Nail Guns Generate Force Sufficient to Drive Nails into Wood!" "Please Note: The Contents of this Spray Paint Can are Under Pressure!" "Be Careful: External Surfaces of this Stove May Become Hot Enough to Cause Burns!"

Well, thank you. I'll return these items if any of these assertions turn out not to be true. Really.

Here's one of the problems with all of this: what's reasonable to one person may not seem reasonable to another. The same can be said for otherwise reasonable persons at different points in time. What would the reasonable pre-Columbian have thought of the prospect of round-the-world travel? What would the reasonable Elizabethan have thought of the prospect of manned flight? What does the reasonable Amazonian (or whatever they end up calling all of us whose typical retail therapy no longer takes place in a store built of bricks and mortar) think of vacations in outer space?

Many things are impossible, right up to the moment at which they are first accomplished.

Sometime in the late 1990s I was working at a very small college in a very remote part of the Lower 48. At that time, the college had no website. That's not as surprising as you might think: a LOT of places and things were not on the Web in the late 1990s. The idea of building a website had been mentioned, but there was skepticism amongst the faculty as to whether such a thing would be worth the effort.

In the course of one such discussion I put forth the proposition that one day, even the **Sears** catalog would have a website. This assertion was met with incredulity. Who would

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go to all the bother of putting the ENTIRE **Sears** catalog, every single item, on a website? Remember, as of this time, if one bought something through a website, one typically had to follow up by sending a check or US Postal Money Order to complete the transaction, or at least a phone call to submit credit card information. There were some sites that suggested that you submit your credit card information via a web form, and in our innocence, bless us, some customers would actually do so. I recall saying at the time, "The Web will really take off once someone figures out how to let you spend a buck on it!"

The scope and consequence of the transformation of business — ALL business, all businesses, to predominantly non-physical public-facing points of interaction has been so sudden, and so huge, that I think we're still, even now, not fully aware of the magnitude of the change.

The original model of putting business on the Web involved finding ways to mimic the stages of a physical retail experience — browsing, comparing, selecting, a "shopping cart," checking out.

Where it started to bust through the digital representations of the physical stores was when business started to listen to the combined interactions of their IT and Marketing divisions: Analytics.

A good friend of mine used to advocate trading supermarket loyalty cards with other people as frequently as possible. He did so to hold out the hope that consumers might retain the power to confound the collectors of associative data. It was already too little, too late.

Nowadays we think nothing of it anymore. Look for socks on some gigantic web store. Then go to take a look at the news, or at your favorite photography forum. And there, in the margins, alongside animated, engaging little teasers for cameras, are socks! Huh? Oh.

That's right. By our behavior we're doing their marketing research for them, and each of us is getting our very own individually crafted campaign.

And this, by the way, will never, ever revert to the old way, ever again. Those little cards one used to fill out (or not) when subscribing to magazines (remember magazines?) — no more — as my kid sister the Classics professor likes to say, "That horse has sailed!"

This is not new anymore. But have you stopped to think how thoroughly this has changed the way business happens? What began as a migration has evolved into a complete redefinition of the basis for business. It has extended to more than just our local clothing store or book store. It has changed our music store — now every musician can be his or her own music store — and it has completely unhinged our cable systems (although that transformation is still underway). Watch what will happen as content providers continue to break loose from the content delivery bundlers and deal with us directly. You can see this during special events: Olympics, presidential elections, "breaking news." During those sorts of events, outfits like CNN (Cable News?) bypass the cable systems entirely.

So during a breaking event, when we go directly to the content providers, do you suppose those content providers look on with interest at who crosses their digital thresholds? From where? At what time? For how long? Where else have the customers been? What were they looking for there? This data is so valuable it's worth the cost of providing free access to the content: more than worth it in fact, by far.

Speaking of the Olympics, have you noticed that video games are in the process of becoming spectator sports? This is serious, with serious audience involvement and serious capital behind it. Perhaps I'm blind, assuming that this might be news to the ***ATG*** Crowd, but just in case, look up eSports in Wikipedia. I guess if it's alright for grown man and women to watch others playing games of baseball or football, then it might be alright for them to go to an arena and watch professional gamers racing through fantastical landscapes, bashing monsters, and engaging in other virtual gladiatorial pursuits. It does seem weird at first glance, but honestly, is it any weirder than watching golf? If you reply, well, golf has some skill involved, than I must conclude you've never tried Mario Kart.

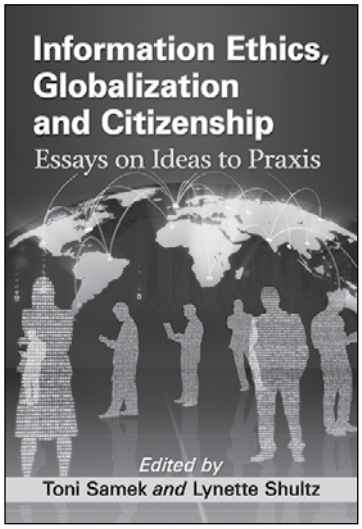
To tie this back to the discussion of business and bricks and mortar, we need only touch an area I spent a column on recently: Virtual Reality, or VR. Been to a cell phone store recently? VR headset accessories are part and parcel of the cell phone accessory lineups. As this becomes commoditized, all the tinder is put in place for a conflagration. What will be the killer application for this technology that will provide the spark? My guess is that there will be more than one, and once ignited this will happen so suddenly that people will wonder how they missed the signs and were late getting on board.

To think there won't be a role for VR in online reference services, for example, is possibly short sighted. Sure, the VR headsets look strange — one can't imagine seeing folks like that in public — but how strange are the sights of folks walking down the street talking into little rectangular slabs, or, for crying out loud, using nearly invisible headsets, seeming to be carrying on conversation with invisible friends?

Wait until eSports mix with VR and then bring in sponsorship in the form of immersive 3D ads from the equally immersive, 3D virtual retail services (not to mention just about any other form of virtual 3D service the mind can conjure). Do you doubt this will arrive? Too late.

Then think of the dinosaurs, noticing one day the small, fragile, strange, and somewhat furry little creatures scurrying around their feet. "Hmph! Those won't amount to much," think the dinosaurs. And that's fine, until the glaciers arrive to change not just the climate, but the landscape itself.

McFarland



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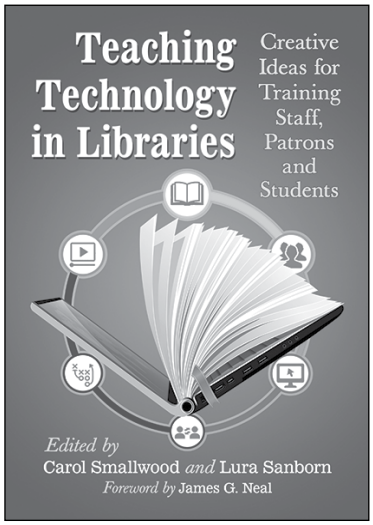

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