Serials & E-Resources News

Report from the NFAIS (National Federation of Advanced Information Services) 57th Annual Meeting, February 2015

Reported by Elizabeth Ten Have

Even though the National Federation of Science Abstracting & Indexing Services (NFAIS) was founded in 1958, many librarians many not be acquainted with this organization. The NFAIS annual meeting is more intimate than the Charleston Conference, but not entirely dissimilar in tone and goal, as it serves as the place where primary and secondary publishers come together for candid conversations about content, technology, usability, business models, and strategies for staying relevant in the noisy world of scholarly information. When one considers that the largest secondary publishers are also some of the biggest platform providers – Ebsco, ProQuest, Thomson Reuters, etc. – the attendee list at NFAIS is familiar to the NASIG community.

The theme of this year's gathering, *Anticipating Demand: The User Experience as Driver*, served as an umbrella for a diverse group of speakers, including established publishers, start-ups, academia, technology companies, consultancies and libraries. Some talks showcased impressive new tools for promoting, discovering and managing information, while others explored the economic and technological challenges of producing and delivering information in electronic form.

There were a couple of common themes across the range of speakers—the most prevalent was metadata. In fact, nearly every speaker mentioned the importance of good, contextual metadata, describing metadata for search engines, metadata for secondary publishers, and metadata for end-users. Search engines need good metadata for appropriate relevancy ranking. Secondary publishers need good metadata for presenting and connecting like content. End-users need visible metadata in order to quickly connect to the information they seek, and then to help manage information while synthesizing it with their own work. Speakers from knowledge discovery tool developers, Sparrho, Sciencescape, and ZappyLab, all stated metadata is a critical ingredient for their products. Kate Lawrence of EBSCO described the company's research regarding undergraduate research habits, and the results revealed how metadata provided important context and meaning in a long list of search results for study participants.

Another theme that emerged was the pace and method of technology development. The long-term development processes that lead to launching enhancements to users every couple of years seem to be fading. Alex Humphreys of JSTOR noted that in JSTOR's current infrastructure, migration-project new code is released dozens of times a week. In his talk, Humphreys' detailed the week long development of JSTOR's Snap application for mobile devices (http://labs.jstor.org/blog/), which allows an end-user to take a picture of some text, then the application OCRs that text, resulting in keywords for the end-user

to employ while searching JSTOR. The challenges of adopting of new methods which speed up product development and deployment were mentioned by both presenters and attendees.

A third theme, which could be broadly referred to as the economics of information, is not new. Micah Altman, of MIT Libraries and the Brookings Institution, titled his plenary talk *Information wants someone else to pay for it: as science and scholarship evolve who consumes and who pays?* Altman reviewed the trend of rapid change in scholarly communication, as well as the players and drivers. Using economic theory, he noted that in this particular market, the market itself will not be able to sort it out. The longstanding issue in scholarly communication of the payer and the end-user not necessarily being the same, and the issue of having differing goals and outcome measures, is now further complicated by technological change and change in what scholarship is: it is no longer defined by publications.

A highpoint to each NFAIS Annual Meeting is the Miles Conrad Memorial Lecture. Named in honor of one of NFAIS' founders, the lecture each year features an industry leader. In the recent past Lorcan Dempsey (OCLC), Dame Lynne Brindley (British Library), and Ben Shneiderman (University of Maryland) have been Miles Conrad lecturers. This year's lecture was delivered by Tim Collins, president & CEO of EBSCO Industries. Collins' lecture encompassed the history of the EBSCO business and its current focus of fitting into the library workflow chain (EBSCO's acquisition of YBP from Baker & Taylor was announced just prior to the start of the NFAIS meeting). Another focus described by Collins revolved around EBSCO's work and investments to improving the user experience, based on extensive research with end-users. Again, metadata was prominently mentioned as a tool for providing improved relevancy results, browsing capabilities, and content for services and tools.

The meeting schedule also includes social space for informal conversation over coffee and meal breaks. The opportunity to speak informally and in-depth with both presenters and other attendees rounds out this meeting quite nicely. The NFAIS annual meeting provides a useful look at the current challenges and issues faced by our colleagues in primary and secondary publishing and gives librarians an opportunity to engage with them.