Faster and cheaper… and more:
Directions in library cataloguing from the 2010 Cataloguing and Indexing Group Conference

Introduction

Shrinking budgets and increasing demand on libraries to deliver more front-line services to increase student recruitment and retention through information literacy support threaten to sideline the customer and business support offered by cataloguers. At the same time, the amount of printed materials libraries are buying is dwindling, reducing cataloguers' traditional workload, whilst e-book bundles arrive with thousands of new catalogue records of decidedly variable quality each month, calling into question whether cataloguers can continue to provide comprehensive cataloguing quality assurance. Cataloguers are rising to meet these challenges through collaboration, modernisation, efficiency savings, and by taking on expanded roles in customer, research and information management support.

Faster, cheaper…

Lean times call for lean methods

The Universities of Warwick and Aberdeen have used hybridised Japanese management methods to optimise workflows and maximise operational efficiency whilst more effectively managing customer expectations. At the University of Aberdeen, this process led to recommendations expected to halve the time from receipt of an order recommendation to placing the order and saving staff time, which could then be used more productively in support of other projects and services.

Catalogue once, re-use many times

Trust and collaboration between institutions and sectors were watchwords at the conference, with a broad consensus that bibliographic records produced by trusted professional cataloguing teams could safely be re-used by other libraries without further scrutiny or alteration. The Research Information Network has even suggested libraries all attach their holdings to a single integrated Web-based union catalogue.

The arrival of RDA will afford further savings by allowing libraries to create new catalogue records from the bibliographic records created and used by publishers, providing the same quality product in much less time. This was welcomed by most who attended the conference, although most delegates admitted their libraries were waiting to see whether the Library of Congress would adopt RDA[1] before making the transition to RDA themselves. Barriers that persist include copyright and ownership of records, although publishers, co-operatives and

the British Library have all indicated their willingness in principle to permit exchange of individual records.

A further innovative example of collaborative cataloguing has reportedly existed informally for some years between the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow, which have often exchanged their respective Middle Eastern and Polish/Russian language cataloguing work for greater cataloguing efficiency.

… and so achieve more

Opening up

Efficiency savings and acquiring some new stock in shelf-ready format have enabled many older university libraries retrospectively to catalogue, and in some cases also digitise, older stock including special collections. By describing what they contain, cataloguing widens access to special collections both by making them publicly visible through the library catalogue and by making it possible to build informative online promotions, such as digital exhibitions. This attracts researchers, and improves the prestige of the library and its parent institution, whilst recording what is present also protects valuable items against opportunistic theft. Examples include the special collections at UCL (http://digitool-b.lib.ucl.ac.uk:8881/R).

At the University of Portsmouth, personally tailored new publication announcement service profiles are being created for senior library staff and researchers to both provide a current awareness service to academic. Announced publication data from the main book supplier are filtered according to subject and audience level profiles set up by cataloguers for each customer or research group and the new publications in their subject areas emailed to them complete with links that they may click on to indicate which books they want purchased. So each month a film studies lecturer would receive an email listing brief summary bibliographic records for each book and e-book announced for publication in the past month identified by the supplier with classmarks relating to films, film studies, direction, criticism, etc., and any they recommend by clicking on the relevant hyperlinks in the email generate a recommendation on the supplier's online platform. The faculty librarian may then approve or reject the suggestions. Approved orders are automatically placed with the supplier and the library management system automatically populated with order records. This encourages academic staff actively to participate in stock selection, infallibly identifies the requested work and version and allows stock to be selected and ordered as part of a streamlined, online process with the minimum of human input before the stock arrives. Such personalised teaching and research support services may help build trust in relationships with customers and allow customer champions to be identified to evangelise the value of technical library support.

Widening participation

Cataloguers are leveraging the time saved by efficiency measures to expand their more obviously customer-facing roles supporting teaching and research, designing the metadata schemas for new institutional repositories and mediated learning environments and providing ongoing metadata quality assurance services to maximise the visibility and re-usability of deposited research, data and learning objects. This research support role is becoming very important in research and HE institutions, particularly those that have mandated deposit of research material in their institutional repositories by using extracted repository metadata as the basis for their Research Excellence Framework (REF) submissions, which form the basis of the allocation of research-associated government funding. The increasing importance of open institutional repositories to research discovery and open access publishing means that there is also a need to integrate catalogues and open repositories and produce a union catalogue of all institutional repositories to ensure pre-publications are as accessible as easily as possible.

The ease of resource discovery and re-use has recently become even more important because the more easily the research output of an institution may be found by other researchers, the more likely they are to discover and cite it in their research, and under the new REF funding allocation assessment, great emphasis is placed upon 'research impact', largely measured as the number of citations received by the research output of an institution.

Future-proofing the library

The new structured linking in RDA will eventually make it possible to allow customers to search the catalogue and retrieve together usefully structured results for all the versions and formats of a work, such as films with their novelisations, all the different editions of a book, or all works for which a person is responsible broken down by their role in a work, for example searching for "Author = Blake" might retrieve results broken down for Blake as author, illustrator or editor.

Standards and structures developed by cataloguers, such as FRBR, have already influenced bibliographic ontologies being prepared for the Semantic Web[2] and promise eventually to allow the integration of catalogues with other metadata using Web platforms to display and promote library resources. These incoming cataloguing standards are really only the first step on the way to a catalogue record structure complex and rich enough to be integrated into the Semantic Web. Alan Poulter demonstrated new standards such as object-oriented FRBR (FRBRoo) and the CIDOC CRM, designed to integrate and interrogate rich cultural information drawn from a variety of different sources and catalogued to different standards, which provide a close fit with other Semantic Web technologies.

Such strategic input by library science researchers into the world's developing information infrastructure has clearly been important, yet it is reliant on continued input from established

cataloguing agencies and the training of cataloguing and metadata academics working in information and computer science departments 'at the coalface' in a library.

Conclusion

Responding to the need for efficiencies and a marked reduction in workload, cataloguers are finding faster, leaner ways of achieving the same high quality product their customers have come to expect and are also diversifying into more visible customer service roles from managing organisational information obesity to repository development. In order to achieve efficiencies and longer-term savings, maximise the search power of library management systems to help support customers, promote unique resources, integrate library resources with institutional repositories and cheaply available Web-based tools that are visible and attractive to customers and ready to enter the Semantic Web, cataloguers need to work more closely with faculty liaison staff and library software vendors need to find lean ways to streamline the development of technology to support strategic library objectives whilst budgets are at their tightest.

The presentation slides from the conference are all available from the UKOLN website: http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/events/CIG/2010/conf-exeter/programme/

The views in this article are those of the author and not necessarily the same as those of the CIG or his employer.

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[1] Library of Congress (n.d.). *Testing Resource Description and Access (RDA)*. Available online at: http://www.loc.gov/bibliographic-future/rda/timeline.html.
[2] Ronald J. Murray. Lecture on FRBR. British Library, 25 January 2010.