Biz of Digital − Exploring Digital Librarianship and Defining Library Digital Service

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Introduction

Library digital services and digital librarian are amorphous terms that may seem to represent a jumbled set of disconnected activities. The lack of a clear understanding of them muddies communication because the terms are understood in different ways by different people. Meshing research, general information, and specific information from practicing librarians, library digital services and digital librarians are defined, allowing for shared meaning when communicating about them.

The transitional column wrapping up **"Biz of Acq"** and beginning the **"Biz of Digital"** mentioned some of the digital services that libraries offer and provided a broad definition of library digital services. This issue's column goes to the literature and to practicing digital librarians to find out what digital librarians do and the characteristics and skillset that a digital librarian needs. Based on the information discovered, the definition of library digital services provided in the previous column is broadened to be inclusive of all the different types of work that digital librarians do.

The definition of digital services that we used in the last the column stated that library digital services includes providing the following, or providing instruction and support for the following:

1. Building a digital collection of information for further study and analysis
2. Creating appropriate tools for building digital collections
3. Creating appropriate tools for the analysis and study of digital collections
4. Using digital collections and tools for their analysis and study to generate new intellectual products
5. Creating authoring tools for these new intellectual products[1]

This column will provide evidence and the rationale for further modifying that definition, broadening its specific focus on digital collections to focus instead on *digital content and technology*.

The Literature

Research on digital librarianship is limited to job advertisement analyses, but these analyses provide a great deal of information. Other articles and a couple of blog posts offer additional perspective on digital librarians, and one book chapter provides a broad overview of digital librarianship. The focus here will be on those works that were most helpful in understanding digital librarianship in a broad and inclusive manner.

A 2002 article by **Croneis** and **Henderson** reports on an analysis of advertisements for electronic and digital librarian positions. They analyzed 223 ads published in *College and Research Libraries News* from 1990-2000. They looked at position title, functional area, institution, and the year the ad was first published. They found that for jobs with "electronic" in the job title, the most common duties were reference, website/webpages, instruction/training, and collection development. For jobs with "digital" in the title, they found the most common responsibilities were administration, supervision, digital projects/initiatives, instruction/training, and partnerships. Digital projects and initiatives, leadership in the field, and production were unique to ads for digital positions.[2]

In 2009, **Choi** and **Rasmussen** published an article on their analysis of 336 job advertisements published in *College and Research Libraries News* from 1999 through 2007 with the word "digital" in the job title or in the position description, duties/responsibilities, or qualifications. They found that these positions have many variants, but divided them into 5 groups: 1) Digital in the job title, focusing on managing digital projects and initiatives, 2) A title related to services, e.g., Digital Services Librarian, Digital Services and Scholarly Communication, etc. 3) Administrative positions to manage a special unit or project. The remaining ads were for various positions ranging from technical services, systems, tech support, and resource management and services. The most frequently mentioned competencies were technological knowledge

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records when using this service. Upon shipment, a print or eBook MARC Record can be provided. This would overlay the EOCR and allow for staff to check in a title more quickly by allowing valuable order data to carry over from the vendor system into this record. It makes the receiving process of a print book much more efficient and provides a vendor specific MARC record that contains library local practices for eBooks. When a title is invoiced, physical processing (full shelf ready or partial shelf ready) can add in the speed that a book gets to the library shelf. EDI invoicing, also known as Electronic Invoicing, provides the final purchase data needed for a library's ILS,

making the process of ordering a monograph from start to finish as efficient as possible.

A library can make the back end of their acquisitions workflow more efficient by taking advantage of these value-added services. While these services can often bring real fiscal saving to libraries, quite often the opportunity costs that these services eliminate are a key driver for libraries. These support services allow staff to focus on those tasks that cannot be outsourced, ranging from the processing of special collections materials to the provisioning of metadata services. Exactly which services a library may want or need to employ will vary based on their individual circumstances. My role is to work with libraries to identify the options and services that best align with their libraries' needs.

After spending the first eight years of my career working directly with specific libraries on their individual plans, I now lead a team of Collection Development Managers in crafting solutions for the libraries in our territory. From this vantage point, I have an even greater appreciation for the importance of the librarian/vendor relationship. As a librarian, I see how consulting with your vendor partners can lead to developing collaborative collection development solutions. As a librarian who has worked on the vendor side for the last ten years, I have seen the myriad of ways a vendor can bring greater efficiency to libraries of all shapes and sizes. From both angles, the mission remains the same — we are all working toward the same goal of ensuring library users have access to the quality materials they need. 🦃

appearing in 56% of ads, followed by resource building, and knowledge organization. The most frequently appearing qualifications were communication and interpersonal skills, appearing in 57% of the ads, followed by knowledge of current trends in digital libraries, experience in digital library development and digital information systems, knowledge and experience with metadata, and the creation and management of digital information. The technology competencies were also analyzed for the specific competency required. They found that the most required specific competency was trend analysis in the digital library environment, followed by frequent mentions of HTML, coding, general computer skills, computer literacy, knowledge and understanding of information technology, a mark-up language such as SGML and XML, creation and management of digital information, digitization, and metadata. Competency in management was also frequently mentioned in the ads.[3]

A chapter titled "So You Want to be a Digital Librarian — What does that Mean" in a 2013 LITA Guide titled *Jump-Start Your Career as a Digital Librarian* provides a thoughtful and broad view of digital librarians. It rejects defining digital librarians as providing digital products and services because all librarians do this as part of their job. It rejects defining digital librarians as those working with digital libraries, as what digital librarians do extends far beyond that boundaries of the digital library. It attempts to define digital librarian in terms of characteristics of the person in the position, and characteristics of the work being done, and settles on digital librarians as those in positions that revolve around technological means of sharing and storing information. It also discusses fusing the role of the traditional librarian with technology, and the importance of not fusing the definition with a particular technology as they often go obsolete.

The Digital Librarian

The digital librarian is not primarily engaged in the activities of traditional librarianship and is in a position that didn't exist twenty or thirty years ago. All librarians are engaged in work that utilizes digital content, tools, and technology, but the digital librarian's expertise and primary job responsibilities focus on the digital rather than the specific content, tools, and technology that happen to intersect with her primary expertise and primary job responsibilities that are in another area. The activities of the digital librarian may be analogous to the activities of librarians in traditional roles, and the activities of the two may even overlap in that their work has the same or similar goals. However the activities and methods of the digital librarian are inexorably digital so that they vary substantively from that of the activities and methods of the traditional librarian. That is, the digital librarian has no traditional print-based counterpart like that separating the (print) cataloger from the electronic resources cataloger, who both use the same tools and methods for their work.

In the public library, the digital librarian may be primarily engaged in supporting the use of digital devises and creating digital content and collections. In academic libraries, the digital librarian may be primarily focused on creating digital content and collections, but may also focus on managing digital projects and initiatives, or in providing digital scholarship services, such as supporting or collaborating with faculty in developing a scholarly website. Additionally, in academic libraries, the work of the digital librarian may be deeply intertwined with scholarly communication, advising the community on copyright issues and conventional publishing options, or supporting new forms scholarly works such as the open digital textbook or the digital story. However, digital librarians' work encompasses even more than this, extending beyond the digital collection and digital scholarship to include promoting resources and/or services via social media, leading new system adoption and system migrations, website content development and design, etc. But the focus still remains on digital content and technology.

The day-to-day work of the digital librarian will vary depending on the priorities of the library, and the role of the particular position. The digital librarian may research and plan new services and systems as needed, quickly acquiring expertise in unfamiliar technologies. She may manage or provide services in a digital scholarship or digital humanities lab. He may collaborate with community members on projects and/or offer consulting in support of community member's projects, providing information on the planned format, project planning, standards, platforms and tools, usability studies, and project lifecycle management. The digital librarian may manage platforms made available to community for digital projects. He may work with digital objects — ingesting them into digital collections, maintaining them, manipulating them. She may manage system migrations. The digital librarian may manage a digitization lab. The digital librarian may promote library resources and services using digital media, i.e., social networking. She may offer specialized services, assisting community members with visualizations, geospatial data, digital mapping, text analyst and mining, etc.

For the digital librarian, a collaborative approach and tools to manage and resolve conflict to move a group forward are more often the keys to success than technical wizardry. Knowing a bit about programming can be advantageous, but programming is generally done by programmers, not by digital librarians. Project management skills may be more apropos when managing the implementation of complex systems impacting entire libraries or consortium and one or more communities. Perhaps most important for the digital librarian who deals with multitudes of new technologies is the attitudes and behaviors that allow him to not only survive, but thrive, in times of rapid change, all the while staying consistently true to the values of librarianship. She accepts change, is comfortable working in unknown territory, takes risks, and leaves behind the old to embrace the new. She has the ability to quickly figure out how to use a wide variety of digital tools, and understand how they connect with the mission of the library, the needs of the user, and with other systems, tools, and services already in use. Resilience is also important in that all risks don't result in success — the digital librarian views failure as an opportunity to learn and to try something different instead that might work.

Since this is a column with a focus on the practical, it's important to move beyond the general to what practicing digital librarians do. A few practicing digital librarians have described their work here:

Sarah Schultz, Outreach and Digital Services Librarian, Utica Public Library — As the Outreach and Digital Services Librarian at a public library, part of my job is to help people use and understand their technology. This is both through one on one appointments and computer classes. The one on one appointments occur both at the library and out at other community organizations. I meet with people to answer specific questions they might have on using their smartphones, tablets, laptops or other devices. I schedule and teach monthly computer classes which include Computer Fundamentals, Online Job Searching, and Microsoft Office Programs to name a few. I also help to create content for the library's website and social media pages, help staff members with their technology questions, and train staff on how to use new digital resources provided by our library system.

Rachel Appel, Digital Projects & Services Librarian, Temple University — As the Digital Projects & Services Librarian I coordinate the implementation of digital projects in the Library. Currently, I work on three major projects. I co-project manage PA Digital, the Pennsylvania Hub for the **Digital Public Library of America (DPLA)**. **DPLA** brings together digital collections all over the country to be discovered within a single search portal that points out to the collections' local repositories. I organize consultation calls with prospective contributors, review metadata and OAI-PMH output, convene the cross-institutional metadata and rights teams as well as the developer standup, and coordinate education efforts such as workshops and webinars. I also work as a part of a cross-campus team to implement Elements, a research information management system, at **Temple**. Elements provides a holistic record of faculty work including publications, professional activities, grants, and teaching in order to track scholarly output. I develop workflows on how to best configure faculty profile's search settings and retrieve their correct ORCID and other database IDs to ensure accurate matching

and ingestion of their authored publications. I then oversee three to five student workers for the population of faculty publications in their respective profiles. Lastly, I co-project managed a **Knight Foundation** grant-funded project to examine the role of libraries in civic data management and preservation. I worked on two technology prototypes for testing dataset preservation and worked on the white paper detailing our project findings. We are currently exploring the next phase of the project. In addition to my major projects, I'm part of a Scholarly Communications Strategic Steering Group and I am set to begin work on **Temple's** institutional repository.

Jodi Hoover, Digital Media Librarian, The University of Maryland Baltimore County — In my role as a media librarian I work to provide access to non-text based library resources such as films, music and images regardless of format. I work with departments throughout the library to make sure these resources are well integrated into our regular workflows and provide input on specific media related issues. If media purchases are expensive or involve signing a particularly restrictive license, I work with our Acquisitions Department to recommend options. Working with the Reference Department as a liaison has given me the opportunity to make sure appropriate media resources are included in subject guides and library instruction sessions. As media collections can often become hidden within discovery layers I routinely test to make sure that media items display properly and are present in search results. I work with our Discovery Librarian and Bibliographic Services Department to resolve any issues that may impede access. Additionally, I assist faculty members with selecting media resources for their classes, including working to resolve access issues for students with disabilities by finding materials with captions, audio description or transcripts.

Conclusions on the Definition of Digital Services and Digital Librarians

DelRosso and **Lambert** defined digital librarians as those in positions that revolve around technological means of sharing and storing information, and this might have been a suitable definition and also led to a definition of library digital services. However, their definition eliminates many digital librarians whose work may include specialized ways of presenting or manipulating information, such as in web exhibits, digital maps, data visualization and digital storytelling, or in presenting information in an interactive manner, through a database, or through a map or graphic that changes based on user settings, data mining and analysis, and other types of work done with information that are inexorably technological. The use of the term "sharing" seems obsolete, as in the digital age, librarians more often provide access to electronic materials that are provided via purchase, for free, or via ILL (even if via a scan of a print article) rather than via sharing which suggests a physical object that only one person can use at a time. Therefore, this definition seems off the mark. Instead we continue to utilize the definition provided in the introduction.

The first item in the definition in the introduction is "building a digital collection of information for further study and analysis." In looking at what digital librarians do, it's apparent that this extends beyond digital collections to include content for websites, content for social media, content for subject guides, and insuring that content appears appropriately in the discovery layer. Further, the content isn't necessarily for study or analysis, but may also provide information about the library and its resources and services, or gather information in a particular way that is of value to the user, such as in a subject guide or in the discovery layer. Further, the digital librarian goes beyond providing but also assisting and educating in the use and creation of digital content. A more inclusive wording of this point moves the specific of building digital collections to the more general: **Library Digital Services creates or maintains digital content and provides instruction and support in the use, creation, or maintenance of digital content**.

The second through fourth items on our list of digital services in the introduction are about providing instruction and support in the creation of a range of different types of tools for working with digital collection in a variety of ways. Digital Librarians, however, are just as likely to provide existing tools as to create them from scratch, specifically, technology tools, and not just tools for working with digital collections, but tools that support a broad range of library goals. Digital librarians may maintain a set of software for common staff or patrons needs. When a new need becomes apparent, the digital librarian identifies the tool that might meet it and manages its implementation. When a new tool is developed that might be of use to the library and its community, the digital librarian manages the adoption and implementation process. Additionally the digital librarian teaches and assists with the use of technology tools. These four items are better combined and stated as **Library Digital Services provides, creates, or maintains technology tools and provides instruction and support in the use, provision, creation or maintenance of technology tools**.

In utilizing these definitions, it's important to note that digital content is composed of objects that are expressions, and digitals tools are for carrying out a function. The same application may be viewed as both content and tool, as many applications mix them, for example, the text in a database is content, and the search box is a tool to find the content. Labelling a particular application as one or the other isn't important, but knowing that digital librarianships may engage with either or both is very important.

The following definitions are reached utilizing the above conclusions:

Library Digital Services supports the mission and goals of the library by engaging in any of the following activities:

1) Creating or maintaining digital content.
2) Providing instruction and support in the use, creation, or maintenance of digital content.
3) Providing, creating, or maintaining technology tools.
4) Providing instruction and support in the use, provision, creation, or maintenance of technology tools.

A digital librarian is in a position that focuses on any of the above activities in support of the mission and goals of the library. 🐿

Endnotes

1. "Our Cultural Commonwealth: The Report of the American Council of Learned Societies Commission on Cyberinfrastructure for the Humanities and Social Sciences," 2006, 7, *http://www.acls.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/Programs/Our_Cultural_Commonwealth.pdf*.

2. **Karen S. Croneis** and **Pat Henderson**. "Electronic and Digital Librarian Positions: A Content Analysis of Announcements from 1990 through 2000." *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 28, no. 4 (July 2002), 232-7.

3. **Youngok Choi** and **Edie Rasmussen**. "What Qualifications and Skills are Important for Digital Librarian Positions in Academic Libraries? A Job Advertisement Analysis." *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 35, no. 5 (Sept. 2009), 457-67.

a trend and vice versa? My son-in-law bought **bitcoins** way back when and sold them at the right time. But that seems to take some luck. **Blockchain** is another hot topic these days. Is it going to last? We will have more than one talk about this in Charleston I am sure. Look at all the hype about **Facebook** and privacy. I am struck by the fact that millennials don't seem to value privacy the same way we older types do. Is that a valid observation? As we develop this **trendspotting**, keep your eye out for what is happening. Would love to hear from you!

Hope you have all read **Corey Seeman's** business column — **Squirreling Away**. **Corey** says he spends a lot of tme indoors and he enjoys taking pictures of squirrels when he is outside. He has so many pictures of squirrels to share and we will be able to have a different picture with each issue. And I should have