Using Future Trends to Inform Planning/Marketing

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Abstract
THIS ARTICLE EXPLORES THE reasons for incorporating the iden-
tification of future trends of librarianship into library planning and
marketing efforts. It reviews some key issues in the financial and
technological areas and uses them to illustrate the way this
information can affect planning decisions. Two techniques of incor-
porating future trends into planning are discussed—environmental
scanning and alternative scenario building.

Introduction
Whenever one thinks of planning and marketing for public
libraries, there are some key images that should come to mind to
help direct the thinking about the future in library-planning efforts.
The first image is from one of this author's favorite poems, "The
Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost (1964).

> Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
> And sorry I could not travel both
> And be one traveler, long I stood
> And looked down one as far as I could
> To where it bent in the undergrowth;
>   Then took the other, as just as fair,
> And having perhaps the better claim,
> Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
> Though as for that the passing there
> Had worn them really about the same,
>   And both that morning equally lay
> In leaves no step had trodden black.

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Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.
    I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I —
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference. (p. 131)

The second image actually derives from a composite of images on evolution from the book *Ever Since Darwin: Reflections on Natural History* by Gould (1979). Those images can best be summarized by the following quote: "Extinction is the fate of most species, usually because they fail to adapt rapidly enough to changing conditions of climate or competition" (p. 90).

The last image is of a conference dinner in 1990. This author was at the annual convention of the World Futurist Society. While having dinner with a diverse group of people—a finance minister from Toronto; a management consultant from Washington, D.C.; an organic farmer from Hawaii; and some others—the dinner conversation turned to libraries. When it was discovered that this author was a library administrator, the consensus opinion of the dinner group was that libraries are dinosaurs and will soon disappear when everyone has home or office access to the information superhighway and all the information resources that will come through it. While trying to convince them that the economics of libraries still made them necessary even in a "wired society," the group was not to be persuaded.

All of these images say some important things about planning and future trends. Frost's poem is pertinent in many ways, but one of its more powerful messages is about time and the road not taken. There is a certain curiosity about opportunities lost. When fundamental change is occurring around us, the paths we choose may be critical for future survival for several reasons. One of them is the fact that we often do not have the time to change back to a more correct path. Sometimes the opportunity window may simply be closed.

Gould's essays on evolution repeatedly convey the same message. Organisms which cannot change fast enough to cope with rapid environmental change or competition will become extinct. Social organizations often behave in ways similar to biological organisms. As the changes occurring around libraries seemingly accelerate, it is imperative that we carefully monitor the major trends that may affect us and evaluate appropriate strategies of adaptation.

If we do not heed the futurists and attempt to adapt, we are destined, like the dinosaur of the dinner table conversation, to become

extinct. And this was a disparate group of individuals that liked and used libraries and whose only commonality was an interest in the future.

Will the library become extinct, as many in our own profession now loudly wonder? Will we travel down the wrong roads and be unable to recover and take the right path(s) for the library to thrive in the twenty-first century? How we view future trends and position our institutions in relation to these trends may have a lot to do with the answers to those questions.

SOME RECENTLY RANDOM THOUGHTS ON THE FUTURE AND PAST

During the past few years, a number of things in the literature stand out in terms of their messages to those planning the "library of the future."

The Public Library: The Missing Link of the Information Age

In his book, *The Cult of Information*, Roszak (1986) has a chapter entitled, "The Public Library: The Missing Link of the Information Age." The chapter represents one of the better musings on the role of the public library in an information age. If Roszak had his way, it would be a central role.

He begins by saying: "It is a curious fact that the contemporary discussion of information so rarely touches upon the library. Yet America's city, county, and state libraries represent the best-developed reference and reading service available to the general public" (p. 172).

Roszak speculates as to why. It could be because, in the eyes of computer enthusiasts, we are so connected with print-on-paper that we lose their interest in libraries. It may be that the computer industry sees the library as such a small element of their projected sales of computers that they have no interest in libraries (we may actually be seen as a threat to sales). And he even wonders if it is not the fact that the library, which stereotypically has the image of being a female workplace, causes it to suffer when the high tech computer world seems to be governed by masculine forces (p. 172).

All of this is very interesting and, to some extent, true, but Roszak (1986) is closer to the truth when he says about the help he has always received from librarians: "It is help I have long taken for granted as a teacher and writer, so readily available and convenient to use that one may not even register its value" (p. 173).

This seems to be the perennial problem of libraries. In spite of incredible success in attracting usage, our budgets are still cut. And we rarely win out in head to head budget competition with other local services. If we were in business, we would be rolling in dollars.

While director of the public library in Helena, Montana, this author had an interesting, but not unique, experience for librarians. This was during the Carter years and the Department of Energy was experimenting with what was called the Energy Extension Service (EES). It was loosely modeled after the county extension service (a successful technology transfer program that librarians should pay more attention to).

The purpose of the EES was to transfer the knowledge gained through government and private research in alternative energy technologies to the general public. The hope was that it would result in greater energy conservation. What a novel idea.

This author first learned about this from some friends who worked for the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for the state of Montana. They had asked this author to review a proposal from the state library to receive a grant from Montana's share of EES funds. The critique was not only well received, but there was encouragement to also submit a proposal. Lewis and Clark Library did just that, and we received a statewide contract, with the DNR, to coordinate and promote the use of information on alternative energy technologies with all the state's public libraries.

The interesting part of this story is that only two states in the United States used the existing public library system in these efforts. All other forty-eight states established toll-free hotlines, walk-in store front offices in cities, and so on.

We ran a very successful program that ended up having a lasting effect on all the public libraries in Montana long after the toll-free hotlines and storefronts were closed. The point is very simple. Libraries are rarely thought of as central players when anyone—even government—is planning to distribute information to the public.

Roszak (1986) goes on to point out a number of very valid reasons why librarians and libraries should be integrally involved as the "missing link" of the information age:

> the librarians had access to many more databases than I could afford to rent...their use of the databases was far more expert than mine could ever be...and [b]y virtue of their training and experience, they knew when *not* to use the computer....
>
> Here, then, in the libraries of the nation, we have an existing network spread across the society, stationed in almost every neighborhood, and in the charge of experienced people who have always honored a strong ethic of public service. If the equipment for computerized reference facilities were concentrated in local libraries or, better still for reasons of economy, if every local library were linked to a generously funded regional reference center, this would be the fastest and cheapest way for the general public to gain open access to whatever benefits the Information Age may have to offer. (pp. 174-75)

Roszak may consider us the missing link of the Information Age, but as long as forty-eight states can establish programs to disseminate information on alternative energy technologies and fail to consider using the existing public library network as a means of doing that, we have a long way to go to become central to the Information Age. It is imperative that we understand the essential values that we can bring to the table of national, state, and local debate about the new information superhighway and the role of libraries.

Information Anxiety

One of the best books on a serious problem of the Information Age is *Information Anxiety* by Wurman (1989). Wurman has written one of the best treatises on information overload. It is a must read for librarians because we do our share of contributing to information anxiety rather than helping to alleviate it, and easing this anxiety may present us with one of the greatest opportunities for the twenty-first century.

Wurman says: "Information anxiety is produced by the ever-widening gap between what we understand and what we think we should understand. Information anxiety is the black hole between data and knowledge. It happens when information doesn't tell us what we want or need to know" (p. 34).

There are a number of marvelous quotes spread throughout the book (many in the margins—you have to see this book as well as read it) that help explain why information anxiety is such a growing problem:

> A weekday edition of the *New York Times* contains more information than the average person was likely to come across in a lifetime in seventeenth-century England. (p. 32)
>   More new information has been produced in the last 30 years than in the previous 5,000. About 1,000 books are published internationally every day, and the total of all printed knowledge doubles every eight years. (Large quoted in Wurman, 1989, p. 35)

Wurman goes on to point out that, as we are confronted with increasing amounts of information, we are increasingly unable to cope with it. "The glut has begun to obscure the radical distinctions between data and information, between facts and knowledge....And the more images with which we are confronted, the more distorted is our view of the world" (p. 37). In an age when we are inundated with more and more information, it is rather ironic, but entirely understandable, why we seem to understand less as a society.

Wurman (1989) turns to the definition of information as: "the action of informing; communication of instructive knowledge." That definition began to change with World War II:

> when it came into vogue to use "information" as a technological
> term to define anything that was sent over an electronic or
> mechanical channel....Information anxiety has proliferated with
> the ambiguity of the word "information"....Much of what we
> assume to be information is actually just data or worse....So the
> great information age is really an explosion of *non-information;*
> it is an explosion of data. (p. 38)

Wurman also cites a definition from Shannon and Weaver in
their landmark treatise, *The Mathematical Theory of Communica-
tion:* "information is that which reduces uncertainty" (in Wurman,
1989, p. 39). When any of us look at the proliferation of information
around us and the increasing and varied means of accessing it, do
we honestly believe people are better informed? Do they have greater
understanding of the complex issues of our times? Is there more or
less wisdom in the world today?

Three types of businesses that deal with the dissemination of
information are described in Wurman's (1989) book.

> [The] transmission business (what most of the information
> superhighway hype is all about); the storage business in which
> there are many publishing and database companies operable
> already; and the understanding business—concerned with the
> bridge between data and knowledge. There are few businesses
> devoted to it, yet....We need understanding businesses devoted
> to making information accessible and comprehensible. (pp. 49-50)

Here, in the understanding business, lies perhaps one of the great
opportunities for libraries of the future. There is one other relevant
aspect of Wurman's book for this article. He holds three principles
close to his heart. They guide his efforts in his new publishing
company and other endeavors. They are: "(1) learning to accept your
ignorance, (2) paying more attention to the question than the answer,
and (3) never being afraid to go in the opposite direction to find
a solution" (p. 47). As we confront a rapidly changing future for
libraries, these are excellent guiding principles for librarians as we
plan for the future of libraries.

Toward a History of Reading

In order to understand the implications of the new technologies
of information, it is useful to examine an article by Darnton (1989).
Darnton attempts to explore how people read throughout history
and how that has changed. From that he intends to learn how "our
ancestors thought about themselves and made sense of their world"
(p. 87).

There are a variety of techniques used and suggested in Darnton's
article. One is analysis of borrowing patterns of libraries.

> By the late 19th century, borrowing patterns in German, English,
> and American libraries had fallen into a strikingly similar
> pattern: 70 to 80 percent of the books came from the category
> of light fiction (mostly novels); 10 percent came from history,
> biography, and travel; and less than one percent came from
> religion....In little more than 200 years, the world of reading
> had been transformed. The rise of the novel had balanced a decline
> in religious literature, and in almost every case the turning point
> could be located in the second half of the 18th century, especially
> the 1770's. (p. 90)

One unsubstantiated, but intriguing, theory discussed in
Darnton's article is from Rolf Engelsing who argued that:

> a "reading revolution" took place at the end of the 18th century.
> From the Middle Ages until sometime after 1750, according to
> Engelsing, men read "intensively." They had only a few books—
> the Bible, an almanac, a devotional work or two—and they read
> them over and over again, usually aloud and in groups, so that
> a narrow range of traditional literature became deeply impressed
> on their consciousness. By 1800 people were reading "ex-
> tensively." They read all kinds of material, especially periodicals
> and newspapers, and read things only once before racing on to
> the next item. (p. 91)

While skeptical of this "reading revolution," Darnton points
out that another historian of reading, David Hall, an American, "has
described a transformation of the reading habits of New Englanders
between 1600 and 1850 in almost exactly the same terms as those
used by Engelsing" (p. 92).

While the printing press opened the world to books for the masses,
other developments contributed to providing many more people with
an increasing variety of literature—"machine-made paper, steam-
powered presses, linotype, and, in the western world, nearly universal
literacy" (Darnton, 1989, p. 92).

It should therefore come as no surprise that, as the new information
technologies develop, they will proliferate and be used primarily for
entertainment and recreation. It is clear from a review of the history
of reading that, as the variety and quantities of information grow,
the ability to derive meaning and shared values from a body of literature
begins to deteriorate. And, as Wurman (1989) pointed out: "Meaning
requires time-consuming thought, and the pace of modern life works
against affording us the time to think" (p. 39).

It seems clear that it is not only the pace of modern life militating
against understanding and wisdom today, it is also the sheer volume
and variety of information we are confronted with. People have only
so much time. How they choose to spend it is an important economic
decision. As librarians, we need to be aware that recreation and enter-
tainment will be the predominant choice of most people in their

use of library resources and the new technologies. We also need to be very aware of the fact that less, but more meaningful, information may be a powerful elixir for those who dare to pursue it in the libraries of the next century.

Roszak, Wurman, and Darnton have said some important things about the future of libraries and planning. Call them "underlying guideposts" if you will. They help place the changes of the future in some context which helps in understanding them better. Those guiding principles seem to be:

1. Libraries need to reconnect to their value(s) to society and reeducate public officials of their public policy importance in order to become the "missing link" of the Information Age.
2. Libraries need to discover and invent ways of not contributing to the "information explosion" and information anxiety. Rather, we should develop new services built around the "understanding business."
3. History shows us that most people today read for pleasure and entertainment, much as they have for over a hundred years. We need to keep this in mind as the new information technologies are evolving.
4. We need to be cognizant of the fact that people are looking for shortcuts to knowledge and easier access to information is not it. We need to be mindful of developments that offer breakthroughs in this important area.
5. We need to remember Wurman's third principle—be prepared to go in the opposite direction to find a solution.

It should be pointed out here that it comes as no accident that none of these works were produced by librarians. It has been my experience that the most thought-provoking literature about libraries and librarians is being produced by nonlibrarians.

Having already begun exploring some past and future trends, let us examine the literature of trends and what it seems to be saying that is significant for libraries of the future.

FUTURE TRENDS
There are a number of areas of future trends that will be explored in this article. They encompass financial and technological spheres. While there are others of significance for libraries, these two will provide enough illustration of how we might incorporate the use of future trends into planning and marketing efforts in libraries.

It should first be pointed out that no reputable futurists would ever suggest that they are attempting to predict the future. Rather, they are speculating about alternative futures or future scenarios. By

doing so, they hope to help formulate possibilities. From those possibilities we might see paths that we prefer to take and those we do not. With this information, we will be in a position to understand how the different scenarios might come about and how we might avoid and pursue different desirable future scenarios, and avoid undesirable ones.

The trends discussed here are very broad and can be found in a variety of sources. These are trends that have been repeated so often that they are becoming more certain all the time. To a certain extent, these are exactly the kinds of future trends that will have the greatest short- and long-term impact on our development. These trends not only need to be incorporated into our thinking as we plan for our respective libraries, they need to be a part of a national discussion and consensus-building effort for libraries and library systems.

Financial Trends

The most important funding sources for public libraries have been and are (in general order of importance): (1) local government, (2) state government, (3) federal government, (4) fees, and (5) private funding. Curiously enough, the financial trends affecting the federal government today are probably having the greatest indirect impact on the major sources of library funding. Due to the excesses of the 1980s, the federal government is essentially bankrupt. One rarely hears anyone suggesting raising taxes or launching major new spending programs. In fact, the federal government has been shifting the cost of welfare and medicaid to the states. In many states, those are the two fastest growth areas in state budgets—often dwarfing all other categories of spending. So, if there is no significant effort at controlling rising health care costs and the federal deficit, we can expect Washington to continue to shift costs to states.

That shift to the states is placing increasing downward pressure on aids to local governments (where they exist) and schools. As that has been occurring, property taxes have had to rise to offset the losses of state support and/or services have had to be reduced.

When you combine that scenario with the recent recession and slow growing economy you get the following trend in local and state government financing of libraries—local government financing of libraries will keep pace with inflation at best and will lag inflation or result in actual cuts in many places.

This trend will be mitigated most often where local and/or state economies are vibrant and the tax base is growing sufficiently well to afford expenditures for libraries above the rate of inflation. Ideally,

one hopes to work in one of these areas or ones in which the library is contributing to local economic development with well-targeted reference support functions.

The above trend is not very startling, and many might say that it is not much of a prediction. One might even say that that is what has been happening throughout the history of public libraries. This author's response would be that you are probably right. Generally speaking, library funding has done well when the city and county coffers were full and expanding. However, whenever we have had to compete within a declining revenue base at the local level, libraries have usually been at the bottom of the totem pole in priorities. "Last to be funded, first to be cut" as the saying goes. There are noteworthy exceptions, but they are just that—exceptions.

It is important to involve ourselves in budget planning because the broad trends in government finance at the federal and state levels show no sign of abating any time soon. Government funding generally represents over 92 percent of public library funding. At present we cannot do much without it.

At the same time, we face increasing pressure on the local financing front, and we also face pressure from another financial trend—the cost of information is dropping.

We all know that the industry has been slow to drop prices for information that is now produced and distributed electronically, even though produced at a lower cost. The industry is, of course, in a transitional bind as they move from print publishing to electronic publishing—much as libraries are. They do not want to undercut their own print products, and there are not yet enough people able to purchase and use their electronic products.

Yet, one may notice that this is making a case for purchase and installation of a CD-ROM LAN because the economics of it make sense. We can avoid the costs of expensive personal computers in lieu of less expensive terminals (at least initially), and as our consortium group of libraries shares the cost of information products, we find the costs of sharing site licenses for these products less than the costs of purchasing them individually.

Now if we can understand this, so can the information industry. Remember the earlier discussion about the World Futurist Society conference? Well, the clincher argument was an economic one. It was pointed out that, while many people who use libraries buy books today, there are also many books people will need but choose not to buy. That is when they turn to the library, and it would be the same with electronic information products.

The conference dinner group then pointed out that when the price of information dropped substantially—to just pennies—

libraries would actually be more costly to use. One is reminded of the fact that there is an "economic" exchange that occurs when someone uses the "free" public library. A number of people have written about it over the years. The biggest ingredient in that exchange is people's time, which has a value to them. If it is a secretary, assistant, or businessperson, the dollar value is very real, and that is why we see many businesses turning to computerized services and information brokers when they need something.

But even the general public places value on the time they have to spend driving to the library, finding a place to park, and then finding the information. At that point they still have to read the materials and digest the information to make it useful. As people experience greater demands upon their "free" time, there may indeed come a point where the economic exchange tips away from the free public library toward commercial services that seem to offer the same opportunities to obtain needed information for lower cost and/or greater convenience.

A countervailing trend that may be emerging is whether people will have less discretionary income. If you read some of the economic literature and labor projections carefully, you may also detect what this author observed—a decline in the American standard of living.

This decline in standards is evident when we see figures that indicate that the ranks of the poor in America have grown. It is evident when we notice how many single parent families there are, and how often two parents are working to maintain a lifestyle that ten to twenty years ago could be maintained by one person working. It is evident when we notice how many young people now work while still in school. It is also evident when we see the concern on the faces of old people who worry whether they will be able to afford a nursing home when and if they need it. It is evident in many subtle ways.

The question is, is it now necessary for most members of a family to work to maintain their customary lifestyle? At some point, the rising costs of housing, health care, and the now customary luxuries—car(s), boat, vacation home, and so on—will be increasingly out of reach of more American families.

If that happens, what do you think will be some of the first things they cut from the family budget? The same things local officials cut when faced with declining revenue—the nonessential library. Just as they cut periodical subscriptions today, people will cut back on, or eliminate, the interactive videos and games, the electronic encyclopedia, and more—especially if they are available through the local library. So, while the information industry debates how much people will pay a month for pay-per-view movies on demand and

other interactive information services, it just may be that economic trends may still work to the advantage of the library. While the above is true for most people in the country, the haves will continue to spend for these types of services as they evolve.

What do these trends suggest to a library administrator getting ready to launch a new strategic planning effort at the library? The first trend suggests we should incorporate a financial strategy of diversification of the library's funding base. We need to secure the traditional base while developing new sources of funding to provide for growth in service.

The second trend suggests the necessity to become much more sensitive to the cost of information to the end-user and find ways to provide a broader array of information resources for less cost and more convenience to users.

The last trend suggests the necessity to understand what the traditional library user base—the middle class—wants and get it to them in order to retain their political support. At the same time, we need to be prepared for people to turn back to libraries, as they traditionally do during economic downturns, when the blush wears off the rose of new information technologies.

The economic "Catch-22" we have always faced is that increased use of the library rarely translates into increased budget dollars. In fact, recessions have often brought a double dilemma of increased use and decreased funding into play. These financial trends suggest increased funding pressure in both the near and long-term. It is important to discuss and explore new financial models for the funding of library service that preserves the public policy advantages of free access while at the same time incorporating the free-enterprise advantages of success translating more readily into increased revenues.

Technological Trends

Technology is certainly where most of the focus of discussion has been in the last several years. The debate over whether or not there will be a public library as we know it is centered here.

Robinson (1992) is but one who raises the question of our continued viability. He raises the spectre of the "electronic book and smart cards in a world of commercial Bookbanks" (p. 54). In some ways it is a scenario not very different than that of Theodor Nelson and Xanadu—his vision of Silverstands that would be everywhere like McDonald's and serve up information on demand for a price (Ditlea, 1990).

Pick any of the dreams or visions, they all spell out the same trend—the majority of information is already available in electronic digitized format, and the public will increasingly obtain their information in that form.

It should be pointed out that this author is an economic determinist—one of those that believes many decisions and actions are determined by underlying economic forces. The switch to digitized information is one of these forces. It is more cost effective for information to be produced electronically. It just so happens that as a by-product of that, you can deliver that same information electronically and add value to it. That has not escaped the publishing industry.

The latter statement is also extremely important to understand when evaluating this trend. Much of the resistance and criticism of this trend—particularly from within the library community—revolves around our sentimental attachment to the printed word and to the idea that people will not spend thousands of dollars for a computer to simply read a book. Those criticisms are largely correct.

We need to remember something we should have learned as card catalogs were automated. If all we were going to do was computerize the card catalog, we might just as well have left it as it was. The real value was in the capabilities the computerization of the catalog gave libraries—i.e., new ways to search for information; the ability to access the catalog from multiple locations, even remotely; and the ability to make massive changes in catalog access quite readily.

We also need to remember that the computers of today may look nothing like the computers that people will use in ten years. Computers can already be purchased for under $1,000. When the convergence of television, telephone, and computers is complete, we may not even recognize that we are using a powerful computer that is linked to a powerful international network. We simply have a keypad (like a remote control) that operates a high definition television that has a cable/telephone line plugged in.

It has been observed that people, including librarians, have difficulty in envisioning new technological improvements except in terms of the technology or medium being replaced. When that is the case, we have difficulty imagining how people would want to purchase it.

We need to remember that the upcoming generations are far less wedded to the print world and much more accepting (or expecting?) of electronic information. And, more importantly, we must realize that the breakthrough developments, which are sure to come, are awaiting those who understand the power of the new technologies. Those who will add value to the print forms of information will drive these new developments. Remember, the explosion in personal computer purchases was owing to the arrival of VisiCalc, the spreadsheet. Then it was possible to do something truly useful with the computer and this made so many more people want one.

We will thus see many halting efforts in the electronic information arena. But gradually there will be breakthroughs in the use of the technology and costs that cause thousands of people to line up in libraries looking for electronic books as they now line up for books on tape.

Another major technological trend facing us is the development of intelligent agents, also known as expert systems or "demon know-bots." This author first read about demon knowbots in an article by Steinberg (1990):

> imagine a friendly demon, working in the background of your application as a personal librarian, flinging itself across a vast network of interconnected data repositories, gathering armfuls of reference materials while you work undistracted at your word processor. Such a demon, called a "Knowbot," for knowledge robot, is under development at the Corporation for National Research Initiatives (NRI), a nonprofit data-networking think tank in Reston, Virginia. (p. 135)

Think of them as software robots. If you thought that sounded threatening enough, "the NRI plans to use Knowbot demons as a linchpin of its ambitious Digital Library System" (p. 135).

> As proposed in its 1988 report, "The Digital Library Project, Volume I: The World of Knowbots," the NRI would explore the technology needed to create a national "information infrastructure" linking huge collections of bibliographic information on public and private computer systems across the country. (Steinberg, 1990, p. 135)

The import of this is that we will not only see increased competition from the commercial sector for providing access to information, but we may also see competition in our role as guide to the most appropriate sources of information.

Our immediate response to these trends at the institutional level should be to plan flexibly. We need to reshape our institutions so as to respond more quickly than we have been able to in the past. That may mean we hire fewer staff and contract out more work when the needed expertise or service program has a short life expectancy.

We also need to remember that none of these trends functions in isolation. They are all affected by other trends as well. For instance, if people are confronted with 500 channels and an incredible array of information resources that they are expected to pay for every time they use them, their frustration may send them searching for a "free" way of sorting it all out. The jury is still out on whether the public is yet thrilled with the break-up of AT&T which was done in order to introduce more competition into the marketplace. Having to sort

through competing requests to switch to MCI, Sprint, and AT&T produces confusion and frustration in many people who would prefer a simpler choice. When confronted with an incredible array of competing commercial information services, what might the public's reaction be?

These two examples of future technological trends clearly call for what Robinson (1992) proposes:

> First, give the best, most cost-effective service possible to the user with the resources and the technology we have....Second, recognize, talk about, and prepare for the future. This takes leadership—leadership with courage to look forward with readiness, not only to accept the realities that technology will bring, but also to implement it for the benefit of the user of information, the consumer of delight, the people who pay us and expect us to serve them. (p. 54)

INCORPORATING FUTURE TRENDS IN PLANNING/MARKETING

In order to plan effectively today, we must scan for future trends. Most librarians probably do this to some extent on a passive basis. In its simplest terms, it involves reading widely and evaluating various trends for their relevance to the library.

Environmental Scanning

There are several good articles on what is called environmental scanning that describe scanning projects, and they are listed in the reference list following this article. Renfro and Morrison (1984) provide a good overview and description. There are several relevant quotes about scanning for future trends and planning in the article:

> However, given the accelerating pace of change, planners and the organizations they serve found that, increasingly, emerging issues in the outside world had a greater impact on the organization's future than internal issues. Thus it became the responsibility of the planner to scan the external environment for emerging issues, however remote. (p. 49)
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>   Passive scanning has traditionally been a source of information about the external world for most decision-makers and, hence, for their organizations. The external environment requires at least passive scanning to maintain a basic level of fluency in current or emerging issues. However, the pace of change in the external environment has moved this scanning from an element of good citizenship to a professional requirement—from a low-level personal interest satisfied by passive scanning to a high-level professional responsibility requiring active scanning. (p. 50)

In general, scanning involves bringing together a group of people from within or across organizations to serve as a core committee. Active scanning would involve developing a list of newspapers,

journals, reports, broadcast media, and so on that the group would divide up and regularly review. Reports would be prepared by committee members on any trends of relevance to the institution. Quarterly meetings would involve discussion of the reports and evaluation of those trends with the most significant potential impacts.

An article by Meeker (1993) does an excellent job of describing the scanning project she codirects for the state of Hawaii. In the article, she delineates the kind of people who populate her fourteen-member scanning committee:

> The type of scanners the Project needs most are the sort of people who need the Project—people with curiosity and eclectic interests who can't pass up an opportunity to read new magazines or an out-of-town newspaper. We are also people who jump at the chance of knowing a little bit about something before anyone else does. (p. 23)

Certainly more libraries need to take advantage of this approach in order to identify future trends. The literature discloses that very few have taken advantage of such an approach except in a passive way.

The entire issue of *Minnesota Libraries* (Newsome, 1987-88) was devoted to environmental scanning in libraries. There are not only several good articles but also good suggestions that local public libraries or a group of libraries ought to explore in order to establish scanning projects to serve local government. This could also be done for the business community.

A scanning project such as this would be a systematic approach to identifying trends that will be affecting libraries, and could also provide an opportunity to develop a new role in relation to government and business that would provide experience in moving from a passive provider of information access to an arbiter of information in support of community decision making.

Scenario Building

A more common method of incorporation of future trends into library planning and marketing is the use of alternative scenarios. One of the more recent examples is the book by Shuman (1989) which this author reviewed in 1990. The book provides an overview of future studies techniques, reviews a number of futurist's past predictions, explores the process of scenario building, and then proceeds to develop nine alternative library scenarios from the "Death of the Library Scenario" to the "Experience Parlour."

It is perhaps most significant for libraries that the only previous book-length treatment of the future of libraries was by Licklider (1965), and it is out of print. This says a great deal about the fact that

the profession has paid very little formal attention to the future, and that may have more to do with whether we have a perspective of everything that is going on around us.

This author has used scenarios to describe alternatives to planning participants to convey a sense of alternatives. In this manner, lay people could begin to discuss and explore—using their imaginations—different alternative paths the development of their library could take.

It might be useful, as some have done, to involve children (or anyone for that matter) in essay contests about what their library might be like in ten, twenty, or fifty years. What we might glean is not so much predictive but more of an idea of how people feel about changes that they sense are coming. Do they seem excited or apprehensive about intelligent agents? It could be an entertaining and informative way of involving people in speculating about the future of their institution.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article has been to urge readers to consider the importance of more systematically incorporating the study of future trends into the planning for the library. In addition, it is hoped that it will serve as a contribution to a discussion about the future of the public library in a rapidly changing world.

Keep in mind the images with which this discussion began. The roads we take can make all the difference for our institutions. In a time of rapid change and increased competition, the wrong path can lead to extinction. Thus, it is extremely important that the library community focus on a shared vision for the future of libraries.

We need, more than at any time perhaps, a professional tolerance of different thinking. Remember in Wurman's (1989) principles the one about "not being afraid to go in the opposite direction to find solutions to problems." This author has personally found it interesting that, at times, the right thing to do is exactly the opposite of what one might naturally be inclined to do. It is a little like Robinson's (1992) ideas of leadership and its willingness to take risks.

This is a time of unquestionable challenge for libraries. Looking back on the few trends described here, it is apparent that we face increased competition for funds, increased public expectations for service, and growing competition from the private sector in the provision of information. That clearly means we will need a sharper focus on our future, a much more flexible organizational structure to adapt to increasingly rapid change, a much more entrepreneurial spirit, and a very keen sense of our mission and value(s) as public libraries in order to thrive in this new environment. Shuman (1989)

ends his book with a particularly appropriate quote from Pierre Elliot Trudeau: "If we don't solve our own problems, other people will— and the world of tomorrow belongs to the people who will solve them" (p. 126).

We also need all the talent in our profession to explore the issues of what the future means to libraries and for supplying solutions. At the same time, every library science professional needs to make a commitment to effective planning at the local level and incorporate trend identification into planning and strategy building efforts. We need to assure ourselves and our communities that we have mission statements that provide flexibility for dealing with the future and that encompass the values that distinguish us from all the commercial information providers.

If we succeed in that, we might find that the following message is appropriate for all our libraries. It comes from a paper delivered by Bezold (1991) to the White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services. It was a quote from the *Library Book* by Schucat and appears on the entrance of a branch of the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore: "I am neither walls nor shelves/Nor even the Books that stand in rows/I am the wisdom of the Universe/Captured and arranged for you/I am the Library/Enter...."

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