

Internet Librarian International 2014 Review

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Internet Librarian International, the innovation and technology conference for information professionals, took place at Olympia, London on 21st-22nd October 2014, with workshops on 20th October.

In recent years Internet Librarian International (ILI) has been a runaway success, moving to the Olympia Conference Centre to accommodate its rapid growth. This trend continued in 2014 with the conference attracting even greater attention, sparked by the demise of Online Information.

The conference focus remains on connecting people and knowledge with the help of technology, and with that in mind the 2014 theme was 'Positive Change: Creating Real Impact'. The conference featured six tracks running over two days including New Blueprints for Libraries; Technology Innovation and Impact; Content Innovation; and Search and Discovery, and the informal, participatory 'X Track' space was introduced for the first time. Delegates could also participate in pre-conference workshops, and a visit to the British Library.

It is impossible to capture the flavour of the entire event in a relatively brief review. In this article, therefore, I will focus on the keynotes, which set the tone for the event, and on the conference coverage of 3D printers and gamification in libraries, which proved to be a major theme.

The opening keynote speaker Michael Edson set the scene. As Smithsonian thought leader and digital strategist, Edson is at the forefront of digital transformation in the cultural sector. He has worked on numerous award-winning projects and has been involved in practically every aspect of technology and New Media for museums.

In his keynote, Edson compared the Internet to the unseen 'dark matter' which makes up 90% of the mass of the universe. The internet's dark matter has an enormous mass or force which often can't traditionally be seen or detected by organisations. This dark matter, according to Edson, is "open, social, peer-to-peer, and read-write - and it's the future of museums, libraries, archives, and memory/knowledge/heritage institutions of all kinds". In Edson's view, without this material, "we're only using a small part of what the Internet can do to help us achieve our missions".

By way of example, Edson cited John and Hank Green, the 'vlogbrothers', who in seven years used YouTube to create an educational and content community with over 2 million subscribers and which has generated almost 500 million views. As Edson pointed out, most

of the ILI audience had probably never heard of the Green brothers; they represent “a kind of internet production that is difficult for institutions to think of as legitimate, sufficiently respectable, educational, scholarly or erudite.” However, we should expect to see thousands of projects like this as the Internet continues to expand, platforms become easier to use, and citizens become more confident.

“Our choice,” argued Edson “will be whether to ignore or discourage these people, compete with them, or dedicate ourselves to ensuring their lifelong success.” Galleries, libraries, archives and museums can play a huge role in the story of how Earth’s citizens will lead their lives, and participate in (and make) culture, provided that these institutions begin to work in “areas of the Internet that are less familiar to us and more familiar to the public.”

The keynote address on Day 2 was given by Rachel Neaman, the newly appointed CEO of Go ON UK, the digital inclusion charity founded by Martha Lane Fox. This was one of Neaman’s first public-speaking events in her new role - she joined Go ON UK from the Department of Health, where she was responsible for developing digital strategy, policy, and guidance on transforming public services, as well as assisted digital and digital inclusion.

Neaman explained that Go ON UK places digital literacy alongside reading, writing and maths as the fourth pillar of basic literacy and its mission is to empower everyone in the UK to reach their digital potential. She acknowledged the empowering nature of technology but she also highlighted the digital ‘have-nots’ - over 4 million people in the UK - with low digital skills. Increasingly, digital skills are required for everyday activities such as managing money, interacting with government services, and applying for jobs. Libraries are already providing access to lifelong learning and, she argued, to spearhead digital inclusion initiatives.

As always, ILI had a keen focus on how libraries and information professionals are transforming themselves and their services to ensure that they are future ready, with the emphasis on case studies. ‘Maker spaces’ which offer library patrons the chance to engage with new technologies such as 3D printing were a key topic for the conference, and a 3D printer was on hand in the ‘X Track’ area for delegates to try out in order to get a sense of the practical potential of the technology in a library setting.

Heather Moorefield-Lang from the University of South Carolina has gathered case study narratives from a range of libraries which have implemented 3D printing technology, and explored the findings in her presentation.

Moorefield-Lang pointed out that the use of 3D technology in libraries was very recent - most libraries she interviewed had had printers for less than two years. She highlighted the challenges that libraries must overcome: managing demand for what is often a very popular service; understanding the technical requirements of model making; dealing with shared resources, staffing and funding; and managing the noise generated by the machines. Staff training is also important, and must often utilise informal resources such

as YouTube videos. Everyone must be prepared to experiment in sometimes informal and unfamiliar ways.

Writing in Information Today Europe eNews, Moorefield-Lang expanded on this point: “since the technology is so new there are very few places to go for professional development or staff training. Librarians and library staff have to work with these technologies and spaces with a sense of adventure, as well as with little fear for failure. 3D printers are not the most intuitive technology and sometimes there can be a learning curve. Maker spaces as well can be messy and noisy and these services may not be for everyone...On the other hand these library services have delivered wonderful opportunities for exploration, project building, collaboration, and artistic creativity.” (<http://www.infotoday.eu/Articles/Editorial/Featured-Articles/3D-printers-in-the-real-world-98093.aspx>)

To reinforce this, Maureen Hood described how Dundee Library and Information Services have been using 3D printing as a therapeutic tool for those with additional needs. The creative process of moving from idea to 3D object generated a great sense of achievement for users, and there were also practical applications for example making accessibility aids or equipment for the library.

Gamification in a library context was once again a popular theme at ILI. Kay Munro from the University of Glasgow and Ciaran Talbot of the University of Manchester shared how they working on a joint project to explore ways of growing customer engagement using the Librarygame web app. Students can earn points and badges for borrowing and returning books, writing book reviews and the like, and the game works in a familiar social-media like context. Initial feedback was encouraging: Glasgow has involved 41% of first-year undergraduates and 27% of postgrads in the game.

For 2015, ILI will once again take place at London’s Olympia on 20-21 October and the conference theme will be ‘Dynamic Disruption’. UKeIG members will be entitled to claim a 25% discount on fees for the main conference. Discounts are also available for multiple delegates from the same organisation.

Further information

Internet Librarian International 2015

The Innovation Conference

21 & 22 October 2015, Workshops on 20 October 2014

More information: www.internet-librarian.com

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