

Meeting Review

Developing and Managing e-book Collections

John Rylands University Library, 2nd Feb 2005

It seems that everyone wants to know about e-books now. Perhaps we see them as the solution to multiple copy problems, or a way of resolving space issues or increasing access to our collections 24/7. I certainly have hopes that they will help with all these issues, but I have also been struggling with practical problems of finding out just what is available, how I can buy it and a myriad of technical problems. This workshop promised to help with some of these issues.

I was surprised that the majority of participants were not subject librarians, like myself, but came from acquisitions departments and technical support sections too. Perhaps this is an indication of how the move towards e-books is affecting processes right across the Library.

The workshop began with a definition. What exactly is an e-book? There are a variety of different descriptions available, but Chris Armstrong and Ray Lonsdale, the workshop facilitators, provided the following; "any piece of electronic text regardless of size or composition (a digital object), but excluding journal publications, made available electronically (or optically) for any device (hand held or desk bound) that includes a screen."

Armed with this useful explanation, we then had a practical opportunity to explore a range of e-book types: reference, fiction, textbooks and monographs. As we looked at the examples, we were asked to comment on the suitability of each resource for our own library and what we felt the advantages and disadvantages were. I particularly liked the Spartacus history textbook (<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk>), in spite of the intrusive sponsored links and the range of texts available in NetLibrary (<http://www.netlibrary.com>). Conversely, I was concerned about the opportunities for plagiarism encouraged on the Literature Network site (<http://www.online-literature.com>).

The main focus of the day was a practical group exercise in which we discussed a set of issues relating to the development of e-book collections. This was an extremely useful way of sharing experiences and learning from both the facilitators and other participants. EBook Library and its link with Dawsons was mentioned as a good means of identifying ebooks, but the group felt that a national bibliography of ebooks would be very useful. Problems relating to acquisition of ebooks included issues of licencing, cost, bundling, archiving, hardware, networking and many more. My group discussed the frustrations of sourcing a single textbook title rather than a whole collection. Facilitating

access, evaluating use, marketing and promotion were amongst the other topics covered and it was interesting to hear how other libraries are dealing with these issues.

We concluded the day by summarising what we felt the main advantages and disadvantages of e-books were at present. Advantages include space saving, no damage, 24/7 access, multiple access, off campus access, no shelving, integration with curriculum, value added features such as searching content and manipulation of data (<http://www.knovel.com/knovel2/default.jsp>) and tailoring texts.

Top of the disadvantages for my group was that publishers still don't understand library budgets, followed by the lack of availability of key texts, incompatibility of software and lack of library control, to mention just a few! The workshop was supported by a useful workbook which includes a lot of background reading and links to examples of e-books, which I have been able to share with my colleagues at work.

All in all, a very informative and enjoyable day.

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Book Reviews

The content management handbook **Martin White. London: Facet Publishing, 2005** **ISBN 1-85604-533-1 176pp £39.95**

If your organization is struggling with managing its intranet or internet website, then you have probably thought about getting a content management system. This book should be your starting point. It provides step-by-step guidance on how to develop a content management strategy, sets out the elements of a content management system and gives advice on the specification, selection, implementation and management of content management software.

The author's aims for the book are modest, and it is intended to be complementary to those well-regarded texts, Boiko's *Content Management Bible*, and Rockley's *Managing Enterprise Content*, by taking a project view of what it takes to get from wondering how implementing a CMS could benefit the organization through specifying, selecting and procuring a CMS product, to implementing the product on time and on budget. It draws on seminars held by UkelG on content management.

It has three sections: information issues, technology options and governance issues. There are chapters on: creating an information-enabled organization; content management functionality; information architecture and

metadata; developing a content management strategy; technology options and costs; making the business case; the CMS business; managing the project; writing a statement of requirements; the selection process; implementation; content migration, and resources. I found the chapter on content management strategy particularly useful; the author notes that there has been a welcome and long-overdue shift from seeing a website as a repository of information that the organization thinks would be useful to a visitor to seeing a website through the eyes of a user. He covers the use of personas to develop an information architecture for a site.

It is gratifying that information professionals get a plug, but not surprising given its publisher. However, I did wonder that putting this plug at the beginning might put off other readers, e.g. IT or communications managers who might be leading CMS projects. In the introduction Martin White claims that there is "virtually no area ... where information professionals cannot make a significant and on-going contribution to the effective management of content, and thus information and knowledge, in any organization that is struggling to cope with business in the 21st century." And it is true that information professionals have a role in metadata, search, information architecture, and information and content audits. It would have been a bonus to have case studies included, a feature of Orna's Practical Information Policies that I found particularly interesting. In this there is only one, on personas used by a university project. Martin White's approach represents the ideal; sometimes it is useful to learn lessons from projects where the ideal staffing or time was just not available.

There are a few signs of hasty editing and some gremlins, but these are minor and do not detract from the usefulness of this book. The annotated list of resources is especially useful. When there are so many websites and books on content management, it is helpful to focus on those recommended by an expert. The index is reliable. Each chapter has a summary of key points, handy for showing to project sponsors, for example. Throughout the text there are diagrams, summary tables, and a very useful chart to assess if you need a CMS at all, on which you can score the weight of your current content management problems.

Highly recommended. You could read this in a day or two and feel confident in embarking on a content management project.

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The information society: a study of continuity and change. 4th ed

John Feather. London: Facet Publishing, 2005
ISBN 1-85604-497-1 240pp £22.95

This book was first published in 1994 and has reached its fourth edition. It is intended for students on courses in information studies, librarianship and communications. Within the broad area of communications, students of media, media production and multimedia will also find it useful. This book enables students to gain a basic understanding of the social, political and professional issues which are being generated by our growing dependence on computer networks in almost every aspect of our lives. To quote, "we have carefully avoided extended discussions of some of the underlying theoretical issues about the nature and concept of information." At one level the computer is an empowering tool which gives unprecedented access to information and to communications; at another it might be seen as an implement of control, giving unlimited power to those who control the information that it stores. Feather sees the central dilemma of the information society as how to resolve that issue.

This wide-ranging book covers the information-dependent society we live in by covering the historical, economic and political contexts. The historical context is that of writing, printing and other systems of communication. The economic context is the commodification of information and the means of its storage and transmission, covered here in chapters on the information market-place and access to information. Politically there is power to be derived from the possession of information and a loss of empowerment caused by its absence. Feather covers the political dimension in chapters on information rich and information poor, and information, the state and the citizen. The final chapter looks at the information profession: a domain delineated.

Feather considers the information paradox: that technology has made more information more available to more people than at any time, but made access to it more difficult. He goes into some depth in the latter part of the book about the debate on the boundaries of the legitimate information needs of a democratic state. The traditional book publishing model is covered in some detail because the process has become the paradigm of information transfer. Feather tracks the critical shift in structure of the information market place; that the commodification is extended from the product to its contents and the means of accessing its contents.

Naturally the Internet is covered, and he contrasts the power of the internet as against the power of transnational media groups: "The ubiquitous URL is the symbol of the revolution."