

## Internet Librarian

Susan Miles ([S.Miles@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:S.Miles@kingston.ac.uk))

### Internet Librarian International 2005

“Transcending Boundaries: Information Technologies and Strategies for the 21st Century” was the seventh conference in this series, held in London during October 2005. 50 speakers were involved over the two days, so this is by necessity only a brief overview of a select few of the presentations I listened to. If you want to follow up on any of the others, many of the speakers have allowed their PowerPoint slides to be available via the conference website here: <http://www.Internet-librarian.com/2005Presentations/>.

The two keynote speeches are worth highlighting, because even some months on, their relevance has not diminished.

The opening keynote was given by Ronald Milne, acting director of Oxford University Library Services & Bodley’s Librarian, describing their role within the Google Library Project. In addition to a description of how this came about and how it fits into their overall remit, the questions from the floor elicited some more specific information. Twenty per cent of the library’s stock is in ‘uncut’ form, so has never been looked at or read! They view the Google collaboration as an access project rather than as a preservation project because it is not about the preservation of the actual item. Ronald Milne did raise the possibility of developing a ‘book on demand’ type of service with copies nicely bound, which was reflected in January 2006 with the idea of an online book store that Google’s CEO Eric Schmidt told reporters about at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. Partnership possibilities involving Bodley’s content was another question raised; apparently working with public organisations is a possibility, although covenants with Google would be required.

The second keynote speech was equally fascinating, as Stephen E. Arnold elaborated on aspects of Google’s impact which could/should raise concerns for those who are interested in search and retrieval. He has been tracking Google’s patent activity, which is particularly focussed around patenting ‘relevance’, particularly the algorithms that calculate a web site’s relevance. There have been more patents assigned to Google in the first six months of 2005 than from the company’s inception. The issue which could cause concern to the library community is ‘who defines relevance?’, if the Google ranking is beginning to determine the level of government funding for an organisation, particularly in the US; should we be concerned about how that relevance ranking has been arrived at?. Another issue is ‘is the next generation of information professionals being taught anything about this?’ Apparently, only two library schools in the US are addressing these issues – Syracuse and Long Island University. For example, Dot Net in August 2005 discovered that 90% of search users cannot differentiate between paid-for and organic search results: more questions raised than answered, and much to ponder over.

The remainder of the sessions I attended were focussed around using collaborative and open source tools to provide alternative ways for library services to reach their users, or to promote knowledge sharing in a distributed environment. There were examples of using wikis to share library instruction materials between librarians working in different libraries in Oregon and south-western Washington states in the US. There was a lot of talk about Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>), a photo sharing site, and del.icio.us (<http://del.icio.us>), a bookmark sharing site; both these sites require users to add keyword metadata to their entries to enable groupings to be displayed. A new phrase entered my vocabulary, a 'tag cloud', defined in wikipedia as "a visual depiction of content [tags](#) used on a [website](#)". To see one in action go to flickr at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/tags/>. Go on, type library into the search box and see what happens!

One particularly provocative paper was from Brian Kelly, Email Must Die!, in which he suggests a whole plethora of alternative methods of communicating information that enable collaboration or that provide information to the gadgets or programs that people use in real life, such as RSS feeds from blogs, instant messaging, wikis, podcasts, and so on. He feels it won't be too long before our users will expect libraries to be able to communicate using these channels, so we'd be well advised to explore them now!  
In a way, that was the central theme to this conference: there's a lot going on that could be put to effective use in the library setting to enable knowledge collaboration and dissemination.