Do we need a scholars' portal?

Belinda Weaver

weaver@alia.org.au

I n September 1999, the Association of Research Libraries and OCLC hosted a *Strategic Issues Forum*. A consensus from the forum was that the library world is in danger of abandoning its constituency to commercial information services in the online environment. This was largely due to the fact that most library services offer information on their own services, but not, or not mainly, a general entry point to the wider world of web-accessible resources. Accordingly, content providers such as NetLibrary, Questia and, more recently, Google Answers, have sprung up to plug this gap. Accordingly, libraries as a group need to take concerted action to establish a unique online identity, possibly in partnership with other agencies such as OCLC and the Library of Congress. This presence could take the form of a scholars' portal. If you want to read more, you can get 'The case for creating a scholars portal to the web: a white paper' by Jerry D Campbell, at the ARL site. Other papers and background are there as well [http://www.arl.org/access/scholarsportal/].

Learning on the job
It can take a long time to become a really successful reference librarian. Library training needs to be married with general knowledge but long experience also helps. For those who want to get on sooner, in-service training can be beneficial. Californian librarians developed a statewide reference training program, California Opportunities for Reference Excellence (CORE), for public librarians in 1988. This was later adapted for another state. The material is largely online for anyone to use [http://www.sjvls.org/sjvis/corr/]. It includes the reference interview, types of resources such as almanacs and encyclopaedias, answering legal, scientific and medical queries, evaluating particular resources. There are quizzes to test your knowledge of the specific works mentioned.

All our futures
If you could not attend the State Library of New South Wales's recent two-day colloquium, *Research library futures: Strategies for action* [http://www.slnsw.gov.au/2010/papers.htm], you can get some, but not all, of the papers presented there in a PDF version. The conference attracted people from research and academia, both from within Australian and abroad, and dealt with the challenges research libraries are currently facing and will face in the future. Deryck Schreuder's paper, 'Webs of knowledge: Australian information needs and 21st century research' [http://www.slnsw.gov.au/2010/pdf/schreuder.pdf], looked at how Australia compares with other countries in meeting its scholars' needs. Other available papers include those of distinguished scholars as Professor Geoffrey Bolton and Dr Robin Batterham.

We wish
Most librarians in college or university libraries probably tear their hair when they see students rush off to internet search engines for every information need. Enter OCLC, and their research paper, 'How academic librarians can influence students' web-based information choices' to give them some hope and comfort [http://www2.oclc.org/oclc/pdf/printondemand/informationhabits.pdf]. All librarians will find something useful in this paper. The study examines what students currently do online, and why (backed up by statistics), and has some helpful suggestions to get them to use the resources the library has to offer them.

The angel Gabriel?
One-stop shops are every librarian's dream, if not their guardian angel. Gabriel [http://www.kb.nl/gabriel/] is the online Gateway to Europe's National Libraries and provides access to forty-one European national libraries from thirty-nine countries (who has more than their fair share, I wonder?) You can use the site to find out about their collections (both print and electronic), online exhibitions and services, which include access to online catalogues. The site is published in the Netherlands, so not all the material is in English.

Speaking with authority
The Library of Congress has now begun to provide its authority records on the web [http://authorities.loc.gov/]. This is a good time to have a look and then have your say as the library is hoping for feedback which can be e-mailed to ils@loc.gov. The authorities available include not only Library of Congress Subject Headings, but also all name, title and name/title headings eligible to be used as subjects. Name, Title and Name/Title are sourced from the US National Authority File (now a co-operative operation with

...the library world is in danger of abandoning its constituency to commercial information services in the online environment...

contributors all over the world). It is not possible to search by keyword at this stage; the index display is based on the LC online catalogue index. Records can be viewed in either MARC or as labelled fields. If you find a heading you want to use, you can e-mail it to yourself or save it to a disk.

Could try harder?

If you are offering your services online, you probably want them to be the best they can be. Who wouldn't? The National Office for the Information Economy seems to have adopted the role of online nanny to the Australian web and has now developed a set of guidelines called *Better practice in online service delivery* [http://www.govonline.gov.au/projects/strategy/better_practice/index.htm]. The best part of this site is probably the Better Practice Checklists. These are short and practical and cover a range of issues such as navigation (this area could usually do with some improvement on most sites), providing forms online, electronic payment, managing online content, archiving processes, and metadata. This website showcases innovative examples of online delivery so use it to get some fresh ideas. Let technology do tasks you could once only have dreamed of.

Up and running

The OAIster Search Interface is now up and running [http://oaister.umdl.umich.edu/index.html]. (OAI stands for Open Archives Initiative). This project, based at the University of Michigan, began with the aim of building a single searchable access point to a range of digital materials, such as bibliographic databases and image libraries, held in different institutions. A big idea, and one that has now come to fruition with the launch of the new search tool. The database holdings now total more than half a million from the 56 different institutions currently on board. You can search each collection individually, or cross-search by keyword, author, title, or subject.

Public sphere

Also out in the open is the Public Knowledge Project [http://www.pkp.ubc.ca/], based at the University of British Columbia. This project is hoping to make scholarly research more visible, and thus more valuable. Currently much scholarly research is locked up in for-fee journal databases. This project is hoping to build on the work of projects such as Open Archives, which aim to develop standards for document preservation and access. Can technology deliver freer scholarly

research? Find out at the site. It also features project publications and links to related resources and research.

Library news

Not every librarian works in an academic setting, but the papers and reports listed on the Council of Australian University Librarians' website [http://www.caul.edu.au/org/document.htm] may still be of use and relevance. You can get articles, papers, documents, and reports on a range of different subjects such as managing performance, business programs, electronic copyright management and more. Not all emanate from CAUL.

Busy government

Two new Government-sponsored websites have emerged recently that librarians should probably take a look at. The new Education Portal, [http://www.education.gov.au/] is an adjunct to both EdNA and the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). There is a lot here on all levels of education, including background statistics. Also just launched is Myfuture: Australia's Career Information Service [http://www. myfuture.edu.au/]. This also emanates from DEST and would be relevant to all age groups. It would obviously help school leavers choose a career, but there is also information on career change and career development. Should you be considering starting a small business, that is covered too. Working abroad, your rights at work and looking for jobs are all covered.

Treaty website

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Library has put together an extremely handsome website on the history and development of the idea of a treaty with indigenous Australians. It traces the history — how the idea of a treaty was first proposed, then the site moves forward in time with the main events and conferences and documents as the milestones on the journey. This is a very good looking site that is also easy to use. There is a warning before entry that some of the words and descriptions may be culturally sensitive, and that some terms used in older documents may be inappropriate today. The site begins with the National Aboriginal Conference, established by the Federal Government in 1977, and goes up to today, with the materials from Aboriginal Treaty Committee and the Barunga Statement of 1988 just some of the documents online [http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/lbry/dig_prgm/ treaty/hm.htm]. ■

...Can technology deliver freer scholarly research? Find out at the site...