fibre FRBRisation

Those not immersed in the world of cataloguing may not have heard of FRBR (Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records) but you will. FRBR is an integral part of the Resource Description and Access-based cataloguing standard that is set to replace AACR2*. And those not immersed in the world of yarn and fibre may not have heard of Ravelry - an extensive database and integrated social network for knitters, crocheters and spinners, but this popular network is actually a brilliant example of cataloguing/ describing, user contribution, and intelligent system design working together to create a useful, educational, and most importantly well-used (1,489,124 users to date) resource in the FRBR mould. Nyssa Parkes explains what cataloguers can learn from knitters.

Started as a small personal endeavour by a knitter and her programmer partner, Ravelry (**www.ravelry.com**) became so popular in such a short time (the first weekend saw 15000 yarn enthusiasts sign up) that when the call went out to improve access to the database of patterns, users rushed to help improve the initially underpowered and under-resourced system. Some of them were librarians, who responded quickly with comments such as, " I'm a librarian and I want to help you clean up this database. I cannot look at this any more".

The inventive notion of inviting network members to join the 'search party' in July 2010 and appealing to the online community to help improve the metadata describing patterns helped Ravelry create a faceted advanced search function. A small range of yarn prizes were offered to encourage participation. In one week 23,500 users categorised and assigned attributes to nearly 160,000 patterns (with admin moderation for consistency) resulting in a million classifications/checks being made to the patterns database.

The database has now become a one-stop-shop for finding accurate information and support. The advanced search, with an extensive (and nested) array of facets, now allows narrowing by details such as language, format, needle size, fibre type, and yardage required, and also draws from the massive pool of user-subjective data to create qualitative facets based on averages such as difficulty, quality rating, and popularity.

Ravelry allows users to post photos and metadata about their own projects and link them to the database. Forums and a commenting system allow each user to discuss work and even ask questions directly from pattern designers.

User contribution has now become a familiar feature of many online collections, but it is rare to see such an enthusiastic response. Clearly Ravelry is working with the luxury of an already-established community of users who were previously interacting and describing their work using personal systems, but bringing the community together online required the combination of many elements: social space, a user-friendly interface and reliable metadata.

Along the way, this group have not only provided access and information about single items in a database, but also described and somewhat broken down the less-hierarchical relationships between publications, authors, consumers, materials and conversations.

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*For an update on progress with RDA testing, see INCITE October 2011.