

On the circuit

2005 LITA National Forum San Jose, California, USA 29 September – 2 October 2005

Report from 'across the Pond' by Dan Tonkery

Since 1998 the Library and Information Technology Association (LITA), one of the divisions of the American Library Association, has held an annual National Forum filled with the usual pre-conferences, general sessions and poster sessions, all focused on new and leading-edge technologies. This year the meeting was held in San Jose, California, and attracted 350 attendees from 41 of the 50 states, and six international delegates.

What makes this meeting a standout is the quality of the presentations (if you don't count the programmers giving seminars!) and the strong focus on technology. If you want to find out what US libraries are involved in or what new technologies are gaining a foothold, the LITA National Forum is the place to be. Going to one of the large national meetings like ALA annual is an opportunity to meet and network with your colleagues, but the LITA Forum is for the technology-savvy librarian who is looking for change and the next frontier.

My first task on day one was getting comfortable with the bloggers who were everywhere actively writing in the meetings. Most wore colorful T-shirts with clear and often strong messages about blogging. Next came some sessions that were developed for users who were much deeper into technology than I ever want to be so I soon learned to select the sessions that were more on my level and that were more rewarding and informational. It is unfortunate but when you have programmers and developers giving presentations, one finds that the visual aids soon become hieroglyphics and unreadable from even the front row. I could not help but think that there must be a better way to communicate. You have all that brilliance and talent in the individual but it fails to come out due to the poor quality of presentation skills. Many of our library meetings should have a boot camp on presentation skills.

Each of the keynote speakers presented papers with very different perspectives. *Roy Tennant* from the California Digital Library gave a very passionate speech entitled 'Googlezon Episode VI: Return of the Librarians' about librarians taking back the land that has been lost to Google. Librarians should not stand by while Google captures our students, faculty and others in our universities. His view is that we have the tools and talent to prevent Google from capturing the hearts and souls of our users, including ravaging our collection and building budgets. So it was a good call to arms that the battle is not over and that we can defeat the monster if we will only change the way we think and work, and he spelled out a workable strategy for the future.

At lunch we heard from *Michael Gorman*, the current President of ALA, who gave his view on bibliographic control and the web, and sadly presented a non-technology view that Google is just a pile of unstructured data that has little value and should be run off campus. Michael was one of the great renegades and creative thinkers of the past twenty-five years. How unfortunate that he came off sounding almost like he was happy with the systems of the past and how great are our online catalogs. He had nothing good to say about any search engine. This group of technology-savvy librarians were all sitting gritting their teeth but too polite to throw food.

My favorite keynote speaker was *Danah Boyd*, a PhD student from the University of California, Berkeley. She is not a librarian but is in the Information School. She has worked at both Google and Yahoo and has the clearest view of life in the technology lane, and librarians would do well to listen to her advice. In the beginning she saw librarians as the enemy as we try to be the gate-keepers to information. Her speech was the highlight of the meeting. It was supposed to be on blogging but it turned about to be much more about how users of her generation acquire information and how she envisions information systems in the future and the role of librarians in that new world. Her speech alone was worth the price of admission. Her comments on the meeting can be read on her blog at <http://www.zephoria.org/thoughts/>

There were two concurrent sessions that yielded useful information worth sharing at this time. The first is a session on Alternative Models of Scholarly Communication: the 'Toddler Years' for OA Journals and the IR.

There were several papers on Institutional Repositories (IRs) and what was most telling is that while institutions like the University of California (UC), MIT and University of Wisconsin have spent significant resources on building IRs, the uptake by the faculty still remains very low. At the UC e-Scholarship Repository only 15% of the faculty has contributed to the IR and there is an active marketing/selling process that has to be undertaken in order to get faculty attention. The UC Repository includes over 8,500 objects and that group has received over 1.8 million downloads, and to my surprise 98% of that traffic comes from non-UC users. At the University of Wisconsin the update of the IR there is far less and they have to market more heavily to get any attention from the faculty. Institutions reported, during the question and answer period, the general lack of progress with building IRs and the overwhelming disappointment with the lack of progress in getting faculty to participate. IR may still be in the pre-toddler stage of development but it is clear

that it is going to be an uphill battle as faculty for the most part are pleased with the present system of scholarly communication. Perhaps the US university community will have to mandate participation or programs as the NIH initiative will become commonplace.

The second concurrent session and perhaps the most exciting presentation from an information standpoint was the report from the University of Michigan and Google on Google's Print Project. Nearly everyone has read the announcements in the press. Google has plans to digitize the library collections of Harvard, Michigan, Stanford, Oxford and the New York Public Library. At this session representatives from both Google and Michigan described in great length the project and how it is working at the University of Michigan. Google has a team on site at the library and they are already in full swing digitizing what will be over seven million volumes including all the monographs, bound serials and government documents. Google is not worried about duplication including what has already been digitized at other institutions or might be available commercially. It seems it is more expensive to try to determine what is in digital form already than it is just to scan the whole collection. Google was very careful not to report on the actual equipment or software used in the project, only to say that what they were using is three times faster than any commercially available scanning process. They are very careful with the physical volume and are not cutting them up for easy scanning.

At the end of the project Google will have a full set of the digital collection as will the University of Michigan. Everything that is pre-1923 will be in the public domain with a rolling wall as material becomes free of copyright. When you consider the digital project includes millions of pages of material and you add in the other four institutions, the digital landscape will become rich and plentiful. Both Google and the University of Michigan believe that what they are doing is within the copyright law and digitalization is moving full speed ahead.

So if you are looking for a meeting that is technology based and sets the standard for what is the latest and greatest in technology and libraries, I suggest you consider coming to the 2006 LITA National Forum in Nashville, Tennessee, 26–29 October 2006.

See background information at:

<http://www.ala.org/ala/lita/litaevents/litanationalforum2005sanjoseca/2005Forum.htm>

See the LITA Blog:

<http://litablog.org/?cat=13>

UKSG/COUNTER Usage statistics training seminar

University of Oxford

9 December 2005

Report by Tony Kidd, Head of Serials/Document Delivery, University of Glasgow

This new joint venture from the UK Serials Group and COUNTER was introduced in response to demand from library staff in particular, delighted to be receiving many more COUNTER-compliant usage statistics from journal and database publishers and intermediaries, but concerned with how best to analyse, interpret, and make use of this invaluable information.

The seminar was held in a newly-refurbished training suite of Oxford University Computing Services, which proved ideal for the mixture of speaker presentations and hands-on experience. Attendance was limited to thirty, to allow each person access to an individual PC for working through exercises. This initial session was also restricted to library staff, but future sessions are planned to be open to any who wish to participate.

The day was chaired by *Peter Shepherd*, Project Director of COUNTER (Counting Online Usage of Networked Electronic Resources). Peter began the seminar by lucidly explaining the work of COUNTER (<http://www.projectcounter.org/>), its origins, its international representation, and its goal of enabling the provision of 'credible, compatible and consistent' usage statistics for electronic resources. He gave details of Release 2 of the Code of Practice for journals and databases, published in April 2005, and due to take effect from the beginning of 2006. He also mentioned the draft COUNTER Code of Practice for books and reference works, published earlier in the year, and open for comments until the end of 2005. Current issues and developments include the imminent introduction of auditing of publisher-provided statistics, consideration of separate usage statistics for back-file packages and possibly of statistics for individual volumes/year of publication, and examination of different interface effects on usage levels. Finally, Peter stressed that usage statistics should not be considered the only indication of value, and that they should be used in context.

Mike Hannant from the Royal Society of Chemistry spoke next, representing a relatively recent (May 2005) COUNTER-compliant publisher. He highlighted the publisher's need, just as much as the librarian's, for reliable statistics to market their products, to know how different parts of their web site were being used, and to know where accesses were coming from and what routes they were following. Just as many librarians are considering the possibility of outsourcing their collection and compilation of usage statistics, so many publishers are looking to third parties to help them to collect and disseminate usage statistics to COUNTER standards, and a number of companies are doing their best to fill this gap in the market, offering services to both publishers and libraries. Mike mentioned some of the problems, or challenges, from the publisher's point of view, including the difficulties of ensuring accurate information matching customers with subscriptions, the maintenance overheads of usage statistics, and the need to compare costs and benefits in the search for ever more detailed statistical provision.

The third speaker, *Jenny Walker*, Vice-President Marketing for Ex Libris, broadened the discussion to include electronic resource management tools, and the development of electronic resource management modules, combining link servers, A-Z e-journal lists, and federated searching (meta-searching). SUSHI, the Standards Usage Statistics Harvesting Initiative, is a current attempt to enable automatic COUNTER-compliant usage statistics downloading to local library systems (to allow

easier comparison of usage with subscription costs for example) that is being supported by most of the major library management systems, intermediaries and publishers. Jenny also raised the 'problem' for usage statistics, particularly for databases, of federated searching: if all databases are searched concurrently, how meaningful are the statistics? There are various ways round this, including isolating such searches, but this will require more standards work, and almost certainly more COUNTER specifications.

Jonathan McAslan from Oxford University Library Services was the final speaker. Jonathan has moved very recently from Aberdeen University, and was able to give us a case-study on the important part usage statistics had played in a major journals review at Aberdeen. In almost every case, statistics were able to persuade academics that journals were being quite heavily used, and should not be cancelled, despite the initial suggestion that there should be swingeing cuts. This was a practical demonstration of the significance of usage statistics in budget discussions, and a reminder that librarians do need to devote resources to the analysis and presentation of these statistics.

Most of those attending the seminar were indeed uncomfortably aware of this, hence the impact of what was probably the most highly

anticipated part of the day for the majority, namely the hands-on practical work lasting 90 minutes or so. This was ably led by *Cliff Spencer* from Newcastle University Library, following an introduction by his colleague *Jill Taylor-Roe*. Cliff was able to share his extensive experience of compiling and manipulating databases of usage statistics to develop time series of key performance indicators, allowing real and detailed comparisons of the value of different journal packages. He had compiled a workbook of exercises for the training seminar participants, based on anonymized usage data, and each person was able to work through the book, calling on help from Cliff and Jill as required.

The day ended with a summary session of questions and answers chaired by Peter Shepherd, and it was apparent that there was much food for thought, and for action on return home, following on both from the presentations and the practical work. Given the success of this initial training seminar, UKSG and COUNTER plan to repeat the event probably three times in 2006, with venues likely to be in Scotland, Manchester and London.

Details of future training seminars will be posted on the UKSG web site (<http://www.uksg.org/events/diary.asp>) and will be listed in *Serials-eNews*