Pursuing the Digital Libraries Dream

Reflections on Becoming a Vendor

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My Personal Timeline

• 1995 – Graduation – MLIS from UNC-Greensboro
• 1996 – 9 months later – Contractor, EPA
  – Internet Librarian
• 1998 – Federal job
  – Web and Library Services
  – National Library Program Manager
• 2005 – First transfer, GSA
  – Web Analytics Manager
• 2007 – Second transfer, USGS
  – National Library Coordinator
  – Library Director
• 2013 – Departure - ProQuest
Libraries Then and Now

Then
- Internet was new
- E-mail was new
- Libraries was print-based (with some CD-ROMs, disks)

Now
- Internet is baked-in to our services
- E-mail is old, almost obsolete
- Library is largely electronic; print is a small part of what users need.

Always
- Library mission is split between meeting the needs of internal users and serving public requests.
- It is hard to get the potential user base engaged, trained, and aware of library services.
- Making the business case for libraries hinges on what the decision-makers value.
The Promise of the Internet

• The growth in electronic resources has made a lot of the promises of a digital library a reality.
• The array of resources online today, and the ways information can be used are astounding.
• However, some promises of the digital future still alludes many government libraries.
• Creation, management, and preservation of digital resources is not supported by the current infrastructure.
• Information security policies limit government library participation in many larger efforts.
• The cost of both content and services also prevents many libraries from innovating.
The Reality of the Digital Revolution

• “Going Digital” has cost libraries and their institutions a lot of money and was not adequately planned.

• The cost of journal subscriptions – and the constant demand for more content by users – has slowed progress on other aspects of a digital library
  – Virtual Reference
  – Interactivity (visualization, workflow integration)
  – Curation of digital content

• Skill sets are still inconsistent across the variety of roles in the library.
Future Generations

• We are “growing” the right kinds of new information professionals
• Academic programs are presenting library and information science as the rich field of opportunity it is today
• Employers, however, are not necessarily ready to “employ” and “deploy” these new professionals well
• The “leadership gap” is not out of a lack of will, but a complex challenge of balancing what is and what could be for libraries
The Vendor Community

• The same charge is true for library vendors today
• There are a lot of innovative approaches to the challenges libraries are facing available from vendors
• Open Source also offers a rich array of options for rethinking both content and services
• Library transformation has to be incremental, iterative, and simply a part of every day in our libraries today
• The vendor community can be a partner in thinking about how your library will transform itself
Making the Leap

• Choosing to join a vendor required:
  – Faith in my skills
  – Faith in the commitment of the company to libraries
  – Willingness to learn the business side of libraries
  – Understanding that there was no “net”

• No decision is permanent
  – There will always be options for me to
    • Return to a government position
    • Lead another type of library
    • Work for a different vendor or library partner
  – We grow by taking on challenges
Grow Where You Are Planted

• For now, I get to:
  – Continue working with government libraries
  – Continue trying to implement digital libraries
  – Work with new content and services
  – Work to try and solve the problems librarians and their users face every day

• I also get to:
  – Remain active in the profession
  – Be a voice for government libraries and librarians from outside the fold
  – Find my voice on issues impacting libraries
Bridging the Divide

• Once a librarian, always a librarian
  – I have the chance to speak, mentor, develop and support new professionals and those wishing to make a change in their own careers
  – I have made it into – and out of – government employment and, for now, can offer some advice on navigating the process

• Find your voice... and use it
  – I have always spoken out for other types of libraries: public, school, academic
  – I can now speak out for government libraries too
Moral of the Story

• Your career will take many twists and turns
• Learn from every experience and develop skills that you can take with you to the next opportunity
• Never say never… the thing you could never imagine doing may be just what you want someday
• Never burn bridges… you may need them sooner than you can imagine