



***Mary Martin's notes from "Poppies, Flying Monkeys and Good Witches: The Future of Libraries," a talk by Stephen Abram (Sirsi VP) sponsored by a State Library Gates grant September 12, 2005***

Abram's objectives:

- n provide a framework for re-viewing your library's services
- n provide a process for re-creating your services
- n provide insights & learnings from other libraries and other companies whose job is to provide info (like Google) and what we can use from them

**Resources mentioned**

- Stephen's Lighthouse – <http://stephenslighthouse.sirsi.com/> -- Stephen's blog with RSS feed
- Everything Bad is Good For You – by Steven Johnson -- book with interesting info about how kids use video games and how kids think differently about and process info than adults.
- Normative Data Project – research on how people use info and libraries – [www.libraryndp.info](http://www.libraryndp.info)
- Stephen's email address: [Stephen.abram@sirsidynix.com](mailto:Stephen.abram@sirsidynix.com)
- Center for Computer Games Research -- <http://game.itu.dk/>
- Got Game: How the Gamer Generation is Reshaping Business Forever – John Beck
- The Google Opportunity – article written by Abram for Feb 1, 2005 Library Journal. Link: [www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA498846.html](http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA498846.html)

**Collaboration**

Abram stressed repeatedly the importance of collaboration among librarians. We need to band together to share information, share the cost of services, and create a power bloc so that we can influence vendors to get them to provide what we need.

**Create a better interface**

Abram said that we keep trying to train people instead of designing the interface so that it works seamlessly. That's what Google is doing. How can we get our catalogs to work as well as Google? How can we convince vendors to provide this? We need to band together.

**Competition with Google**

Should libraries be scared of Google? (I for one know that I use Google and Amazon and find them much more efficient and better to search and more reliable than even our online catalogs.)

Google Scholar – [scholar.google.com](http://scholar.google.com) – has 200 database suppliers and is openURL compliant

Google Local is populated by businesses who advertise in the Yellow Pages, so libraries, since we don't, are likely not coming up. SO do a local search for books and you'll get bookstores, not libraries. **Solution: you can register with Google, Yahoo and MSN Local services without buying a yellow pages ad.**

Check out Google Labs and Google Zeitgeist. Google Personalized and Google Desktop are two additional services that take information about what people are doing and looking for and



then personalize the search tool for them. (There is, of course, concern about what companies are doing with this information they are “mining” from our hard drives and our searches.)

### **Differentiating libraries from the Internet and search engines**

#### **How to differentiate ourselves from Google**

- n Google is not as good at answering WHY and HOW questions as it is on answering WHAT, WHERE, WHEN and WHO. The why and how questions are ones that librarians are good at.
- n Librarians know how to triangulate – get the information from at least 3 independent sources, especially if it’s mission-critical.
- n As librarians we should focus on information transformation, not on the information transaction.

Librarians are working in the space between information and knowledge – we act as a conduit, helping to inform the patrons. We are not about information because that is a static transaction. We are about helping to inform patron – active participants.

It may help to focus on the whole of what libraries can provide, not on individual tools. Don’t focus on advertising “We have these databases and these books” – because those are just the tools with which we can help to inform people, and they are not what we are about. We should be focusing on what we can do to help people, how we can help inform people, and we can think about how people need or want to feel in the library, and help achieve that. **(Focus on the forest instead of the trees.)**

Technology is an enabler only, a tool.

Our library systems should “play well” with others, and our technology should integrate with other technologies in our community.

### **How can we attract people to the library?**

Who do we want to attract to the library (which groups of people) and what do they want to feel when they use the library?

- n Who are our users, what do they want and how can we influence them?
- n We already have traditional services for our library users who are boomers and senior citizens.
- n 90% of kids under 25 have an IM address. **Consider getting an IM address for your ref department.** (Jessamyn West also talked about this at NJLA in April- see <http://www.librarian.net/talks/njla/>)

### **Low-cost possibilities for adding service (but high discomfort for those of us not used to communicating in this way)**

Sign up for free IM accounts for your library with the top IM services. Teach staff how to use it.

- n If your library provides wireless access, have it automatically change the user’s home page to your library’s page.

(Mary’s comment): Turn it around! Why should we try to make young people today adapt to our ways? They are adapting to use the world and its tools. They are evolving. We are like dinosaurs trying to teach our youth to do things the old way when the old way isn’t that effective anymore.



Teach yourself and your fellow librarians to be info-literate in the way that today's young people are info-literate. (The Everything Bad is Good For You book by Steven Johnson is a good place to start working towards a shift in your perspective.)

Identify how information fits into people's workflows. Provide the information at the point of need, not on the desktop. How/where are people going to need access to this information? (*One small example: providing access to your library's catalog in the areas of the library where people are likely going to need to look up books, not making them walk all the way to the front of the library like my library currently does.*)

### **Incorporate better ways of searching into your library**

Federated searching – using federated searching is one way to reduce the number of hurdles people have to go through in order to find the info they need. (Mary's comment: But frankly, Google does federated searching a LOT better than any of the federated searching tools I've seen – all of which are only as smart as their dumbest component databases, right now.)

Clustered searching: clusty, vivisimo – provides the search results in clusters – e.g search on Mercury, get clusters on the god, the planet, the car, the element, etc – then you click on the cluster that is most relevant and it refines your search even more...

### **Other ideas of things we can do**

Harris County Public Library had a browser toolbar that people could download so they could search the library catalog from the toolbar, like you can search Google from the toolbar without being there,

Allow people to pay fines online (via PayPal). Paying fines can be a painful experience to people because they have to go in and admit they owe money. They might not only not pay, but also avoid the library because of it. But if you enable to pay fines online, they can avoid an embarrassing interaction and the library gets its fine money.

### **Thoughts to ponder**

"If television is a babysitter, the Internet's a drunken librarian."

"Would those who say it can't be done please get out of the way of those of us who are already doing it?"