

Back Talk — Charleston Wrap Up: Top 10 Things I Learned at the Charleston Conference

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It has been a few years since I have attended the **Charleston Conference**. I enjoyed the 2006 version of this important meeting immensely. I have always had the habit of drawing circles on blank pieces of paper and filling in the circles with ideas for things I might do at my own library based upon what I am hearing. Sometimes the ideas are only remotely related to the topic of the speaker but the speaker jolts me into rethinking a problem with which I have been wrestling. A good conference results in lots of circles. This, of course, isn't totally a good thing as it results in more work both for myself and anyone else I can con into implementing another good idea. I'm sure I am not the only person to do this sort of thing.

This year I agreed to share my doodles/circles on the last morning of the conference in the form of a somewhat tongue-in-cheek presentation entitled: "Genius at Work: Top 10 ideas I heard at the **26th Annual Charleston Conference** that I plan to introduce back home as if I had thought of them myself." Consequently I have decided to share these thoughts with all of you in "Back Talk."

Before going to my Top 10 Ideas, let me also review some general ideas/insights that I gleaned from the meeting:

- Someone presented a very tidy sound bite on the most important outcomes of out of control rising journal prices: "reduced scholarly access to the literature and a reduction of monographic publishing." That may seem to be a bit old hat and "sky is blue" observation, but I think at times I have lost track of these basic truths and rather focused on the other more personal distasteful outcomes of high serials prices: figuring out how many dollars of subscriptions have to be cut; the share each department must bear

of this amount; proving this is necessary to our own staff; coming up with lists of candidates for cutting; getting the faculty to review the lists before leaving campus in the summer; communicating the cuts to vendors; etc.

- This **Charleston Conference** was full of talk about Open Access journals. The goal, depending upon who you are, seems to either be to weaken the monopoly of control and pricing that big publishers have; or simply to make it easy for scholars to share their findings with each other. The question then seems to be how to make Open Access journals the norm and not friendly freaks hidden in the corners of academe. There seems to be two approaches: (1) Librarians become publishers themselves or give their money to those who claim to be price friendly; OR (2) we figure out how to allow publishers to continue to make money but at the same time allow open access to the content they are selling. Short term open access embargoes seem to be the tool of choice: publisher sells immediate access to the content (there is an embargo placed upon open access) of their journals but then the publisher allows open or free access to scholars worldwide. Wealthy libraries pay in behalf of their patrons so poorer librarians and their patrons can read later. It seems, however, that for smaller publishers embargoes are simply adding to the problems they must overcome in their attempt to remain sustainable.
- There are at least a few other librarians in the world who share my fear that the ultimate result of the Open Access phenomena will be the migration of library's

serials funds out the door of the library, across the quadrangle, up the steps and into the faculty research center offices which will have the job of allocating these funds to researchers so they can pay to make their research openly accessible.

- The amount of information generated now doubles every 18 months. This is real job security assuming all of us involved in the information business can redefine ourselves at the same speed of technological change.
- Serials vending has always been a tough business — making a living by trying to squeeze a little money from both stingy librarians and publishers. But digital journals present real difficulties — so much so that some big publishers have pushed vendors out of the way to meet library needs which it is claimed that vendors have not been able to meet.
- Institutional repositories are still having a tough time getting populated: 81% have fewer than 3,000 items; 96% less than 20,000 items. We are just starting one up and while we have 20,000 items I am increasingly worried we might be starting a war to which no one will come.
- **Google** seems really intent upon, totally committed to and in fact becoming "The world's information provider." Many libraries are joining them in this effort. It is also clear that **Google** has decided that it is simply easier to digitize everything its partners will give it rather than try to figure out how to cooperate with earlier commercial and non-commercial efforts to digitize older materials.

I could perhaps go on and on listing all sorts of interesting things I heard including that **Harold Varmus**, the champion of free access to information earns \$2.5 million a year plus perks. Great work if you can find it. But here is my Top 10 list of ideas I stole (hallucinated?) from the **Charleston Conference**:

10. Start a new movement to replace open access, **SPARC**, and every other attempt to get publishers to reduce their prices and expand access in favor of **BRAIN TUNES**. All publishers will deposit articles into something resembling **iTunes** 12 months after publication enabling scholars to sign up for an RSS feed and read to their heart's desire.
9. Hire or reassign someone to be our datasets librarian. The future may have been "plastics" in days gone by, but datasets will be critical in the future and most are not sufficiently commercial to become part of the **Google** world.

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8. Communicate to our users that books are still important to us; that we are still buying them, and make sure that at least part of our libraries are conducive to the reading of books. Otherwise we will alienate a significant portion of our patrons who still do and will continue to love books.
7. Make porting of our content to course management systems a priority. I learned that 90% of US universities have standardized on a course management system and WebCT/Blackboard have signed a deal with **Google** to make it easy to integrate its content within class modules — this was after **WebCT/Blackboard** unsuccessfully tried to work with library ILS vendors to do the same.
6. Adopt a WEB accessible rights management database that makes it clear under what copyright related regulations have we digitized what we are presenting to our readers.
5. Get Hong Kong's eight universities to reduce their overhead and increase the value of their separate institutional repositories by creating one repository with eight separate mega communities. We

also need to unite with mainland China's IR movement to mandate authors to upload their government funded research into our repositories.

4. Brainstorm with everyone on the staff on how to get our resources and services out in the face of our users since it is apparent that about 90% of the time they/we have chosen to **Google** and automatically discount what we have to offer.
3. Take advantage of **Web2.0** at every turn. Interactivity is the name of the game and it makes the information enterprise more personal, more fun.

2. Get back into the hand-held computing device business. Several years ago we had already partnered with a commercial partner in Hong Kong to port our ILS, cross database searching, etc., initially to the Palm and then to other hand-held devices but the day of small screen information services has finally arrived.

1. Redesign our ILS search page to look and act like the world's most successful search engine.

See you next year in Charleston. 🌳

