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Expanding Our Boundaries With Technology

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EXPANDING OUR BOUNDARIES WITH TECHNOLOGY

*Kate F. Nevins,
Director of the South-
eastern Library Network,
(SOLINET) brought
this keynote address to
the General Session of
the 2002 Conference of
the Association of
Christian Librarians.*

*"Expanding Our
Boundaries" was the
theme of the Conference.*

"When Kate first came to speak at the ACL Conference at Lee University, I think I'm not exaggerating by saying we fell in love with her and she fell in love with us. We enjoyed her and her enthusiasm and she enjoyed us. I was trying to figure out what I was going to plan for another general session at this year's conference and about that time Steve Preston sent me a note saying, 'Just got a note from Kate, and she is so excited that ACL was coming back here and she wanted to come to the conference. Was there anything she could do?'"

Our conference theme is about expanding our boundaries in the area of information literacy, which is certainly appropriate. We are also expanding our boundaries technologically. The two things go hand and hand. So, I asked her to come join us today. I'm sure all of you know by now, she is the head of SOLINET. For those of you not from this part of the country, it's the largest of the OCLC networks and besides all the usual stuff, they are very well known especially in this part of the country for the wonderful workshops that they put on.

So Kate, tell us what's going on."
(Introduction given by Barbara Nelson,
Auburn University Library and ACL
Conference Program Team Leader.)

Thank you very much, Barb, for this chance to speak and I did fall in love with this group at Lee University. I tried to think of a reason I could justify going to your conference in California, which is a

long way from the SOLINET territory and from Illinois even though that was a little closer. So, I'm thrilled that this meeting is here in the Southeast and that the next meeting is in the Southeast. So, I already have it on my calendar and I can hardly wait.

I would like to start by just saying how wonderful our morning was. I am still overwhelmed by it quite frankly. I am just so pleased to be here. I would like to thank Steve Preston for making it possible for me to speak. I want you to know that I am going to come to your conferences even if you don't ask me to speak. I feel a sense of doom throughout the group. "Oh, we are going to hear from Kate again next year." So I do look forward to seeing you all in Kentucky and the wonderful new library at Asbury as well.

I would like to talk today about technology in libraries. I want to give you a warning; I am not a technologist by any means. I don't plan on actually spending the time telling you the latest and greatest in standards and technologies and acronyms. Instead, I wanted to talk about how we as librarians need to stay focused on the technology, some the opportunities and challenges so that we can be effective in the future.

Regardless of what technology is, these are the hints that I would bring to you. Now I know everyone who is attending our universities today thinks that technology started with their generation. But if you look at the timelines you will see that technology has been pervasive for some time. As long ago as 3000 BC, there was major

innovation with the first written language, which was the Sumerian pictographs. I was interested to read on this timeline from the Internet that the pictographs included annotations so that you would know how the words were pronounced. So that's the first recorded written language.

In the year 100 AD was the first bound book with separate pages and all the information compiled together, the Roman codex, if you are familiar with that. In 1455 we find the first printing press. We find a guy that you may have heard of named, Guttenberg. In 1802 the Library on Congress was founded. In 1830, the first viable design for a digital computer was completed and that was by Charles Babbage with his analytic machine. It used punched cards to enter and manipulate data. Now when I say he used it, I mean in the design he used it. He never got it to work because it was mechanical rather than electronic and the technology didn't support it. But at least the ideas

were there. In 1876 came the implementation of the Dewey Decimal system. The Dewey Decimal system was very significant. When you read about information, theory, and technology, this is often cited for its innovation for two things: it was designed to address the problem of or

ganizing books by subject while leaving adequate space for new publications and new knowledge. It was very future-oriented. That is something librarians can be very proud of. Have you ever seen the little cartoon for the Dewey Decimal system? It's got one panel and it's got a horizon. And stretching to the horizon is dots. Dots everywhere. And the tag line is, "Dewey Decimals before there was a system." I've always enjoyed that.

In 1946 was the first working digital computer, ENIAC. It took up a whole room. It was operated with vacuum tubes and cables. It had less power than the first personal computers, when those came available. It is interesting that this is where the word "bug" came from. For those of you who don't know this story, cables were attached to these tubes to run all this data and once they couldn't get it to work. So, they did an investigation and found that a moth had gotten in between one of the cables and the tubes. So, that is how they started calling errors bugs. I thought that was interesting.

MARC was developed in 1960. Think of what the impact of LC MARC has been in terms of the ability to input bibliographic records in a form that's readable by mainframe computers. It opened the door for exchange of data, something we take for granted now in our libraries. This is foundational for what we as librarians are able to do.

Now, we switch some gears. In

The Dewey Decimal system was very significant. When you read about information, theory, and technology, this is often cited for its innovation for two things: it was designed to address the problem of organizing books by subject while leaving adequate space for new publications and new knowledge. It was very future-oriented. That is something librarians can be very proud of.

1969, UNIX came along, an operating system that handled multi-tasking and could run on a variety of computers. It was the first operating system that was suitable for networking computers because it could do many things at one time and it could be used on different equipment. Also in 1969 was the development of the ARPANET. ARPANET was the predecessor for the Internet. The Internet grew out of this and was put together by the government

for defense, space, and research purposes so that researchers in different locations could share information about the work they were doing. You know, one of the fascinating things about ARPANET, which is true about the Internet today, is that it is very distributive. There are many different routes that information can take to get from one site to the next. And that was developed so that the system would be able to withstand nuclear attack. Who knew that? That's one reason why we have the Internet today.

The microprocessor chip came in 1971. No more vacuum tubes. It was a thing that allowed us to suddenly start thinking about computers that didn't take huge rooms but could sit on our desktop. It wasn't until 1977 that Apple II was the first fully assembled microcomputer with keyboard, monitor, and operating software all included.

It wasn't until 1981 that IBM introduced its PC. That's just a little over twenty years ago. Now I worked for OCLC at the time and I remember having meetings as an Interlibrary Loan Coordinator. Having meetings with the OCLC Office of Research, which is where all knowledge about such things resided. How could we use these new personal computers for OCLC functions? You know--brainstorming, writing on the board, all those kinds of things we do.

Now I remember, I talked with one fellow of what we did in the Interlibrary Loan system and I said, "Well, you have all these numbers for requests and you enter the number and say you received that number. Then you enter another number and you received that item." And you could do that fifty times a day. And he said, "Why don't you just have the PC do that?" I said,

"They can do that?" That was my first insight into the possibilities of PC's.

How far we've come since then in twenty years. The World Wide Web was not initiated until 1990. That was an outgrowth of that ARPANET that I mentioned.

This was when the World Wide Web was created. OCLC started doing away with its

dedicated phone lines as a result of this.

In 1994, Netscape was introduced and so on. The change was so rapid after that I didn't even make a timeline because I didn't want to give you that many pages.

Look where we are after only twenty-five years from the introduction of the first PC. Why am I going through all this? I do have a point actually, believe it or not.

Let me summarize Kate's world technology view. This is not based on anything that someone lofty has said. This is my own assessment. We have three phases of information technology and we are in the third phase. The first phase starting back in 3000 BC was recording information. We had such things as written language, printing, books, the printing press, all of those things. Recording information. That lasted thousands of years, by the way, the evolution in that area.

The second area is collecting and organizing information. Libraries are founded; classification schemes are developed; all of that. That phase lasted hundreds of years.

Then our third phase, delivering and using information effectively through automation. This phase lasts decades or years. Sometimes it feels like weeks before something I'm using is out of date. What does this tell us about technology? Technological change is rapid and accelerating and you can't hold back the tide. Moreover it is continuous.

You know, I used to think if I could

just get through this period of implementing this system then I can rest a few years before we have to do something else. That's not true anymore! We are thinking what next, what do I need know, what do I need to

be doing? So, it's ongoing, it's rapid, it's profound. Think about

each of those three phases that I mentioned in the recording of information. How profound that has been in terms of society and individuals.

I also think that technology for libraries is an opportunity. I know you probably all agree with this. Sometimes I have a little fear when I use the word, "opportunity", because I had a boss once who always said "opportunity" when he meant "problem". He would come in my office and say, "Boy, do I have an opportunity for you." And I would be really afraid.

Sometimes it's easy in libraries to think that way because we're really trying to stay ahead of things. But it really is an opportunity for us. Consider the many ways we are delivering information and serving users now that we didn't ten years ago.

I don't know about you but I had no web skills ten years ago, for example, or the ability to search the online databases online that are now available to us. It has been sometimes painful to arrive at our current happy state of technology. But, the technology did enable us. We have many more opportunities and challenges ahead.

Remember that cycle -- thousands of years, hundreds of years, to decades, or smaller. That is what we are going to see. So, in light of these opportunities and challenges, what is a librarian to do?

My big advice: We must act now for the future. What is that old cliché? Today is the first day of the rest of your life. That is certainly true for us when we think of what tools we can use to

serve our library users in the future. So, I have some practical steps for librarians.

The first step, number one: Keep up with technology. Well, duh! Obviously we all want to keep up with technology. However saying it like that is much like telling a drowning man that the answer is he should swim. Easier said than done.

So, let me talk about what I mean when I say keep up with technology. Well, first let's talk a little bit about library technologies. It's important for us to know what the current state of technology is, what the developments are for the future, and more to the point, what the implications are to those developments. You know, I have gone to a lot of sessions where a technologist speaks and I sort of understand what he or she is saying, but he or she has not touched on what does this mean for libraries.

I think our challenge is to keep up with technology in a way that we're understanding what the implications are for what we do. Now, it's one thing when people talk about technology. There's sort of this idea that all libraries want to be on the bleeding edge of technology with the newest stuff. Whatever is out there, if we have the money, or we have the knowledge for it, then we should do it. You know some libraries are out there are bleeding edge libraries. I appreciate that they are there testing and piloting things for us, helping us understand. But for some libraries it is more appropriate, based on where they are, to be cutting edge or within spitting distance of cutting edge. Sometimes even trailing edge is acceptable. What we don't want to be as librarians is totally edgeless!

So, here's how I think we should do those things about keeping up with technology. First, there is no question that there is value in going to conferences. I know that for some of us, travel money can be challenging and that many non-librarians think that librarians go off to conferences and play. But, I can attest for this group

who has sessions at midnight, that librarians have a very strong work ethic and use their conferences well. Hearing from colleagues is so important and visiting the exhibits. I look at vendors as partners at keeping us up to date in technology cause they have futurists and technologist that can tell us about things that we do not know ourselves.

The second thing is to read. Librarians are information consumers in a big way, but reading everything that there is is a challenge. I keep my "to-read" pile on my desk and then I think I'm never going to get to this here in the office, so I take it home and I put it on the "to-read" table with everything else that I brought home. After a while, it migrates to the "to-read" spare bedroom. There's talk about having an annex built out back!

This is hyperbole, I know, but the fact of the matter is that there is more to read than you could possibly ever consume. My approach to this is to identify a few writers whose work I always want to read. For me, they are not the cutting edge people, except for those who are on the cusp in terms of new technology and the implications for libraries. What's the practical application? For example, for me, I never miss Walt Crawford's column in *American Libraries*. I never miss Carol Tenipier when she writes in library journals from the reference side. There are certain listservs that I stay on because of my interest in certain areas.

You know, my advice to everyone is to identify who those are whom you must keep up to date with because they are really helpful.

The other thing that is so helpful is that in the SOLINET shop, we've sort of divvied up the world. I can't read everything, so I have colleagues that keep up with everything that's happening with OCLC for example. Once every two weeks or three weeks we get together and discuss what's hot in preservation or in training in OCLC, so that we can rely on that expertise.

Librarians don't need to know

everything, they only need to know where to find it. Our colleagues are that kind of resource for us if we can work that out. Our colleagues can help us with the implications of technology as well.

The other thing that I think of in terms of keeping up is to participate actively in library associations and cooperatives networks, because these are opportunities for groups of people who have a common interest to come together periodically and identify opportunities to work on together. It may be that some libraries develop expertise and interest in some areas where they can bring the rest of us along. Of course I have to say that working for a network! But I believe that networks are a great way to take part. I would really encourage you all to look for those opportunities.

Second, I think it is very important for us to keep up with what's happening with technology outside the library field. You know it's a cliché to say that many of the developments that impact libraries started in the consumer market. Because it's in the consumer market where there is enough critical mass for some of these technologies to develop. CD-ROM is a great example. We think of it as a way to distribute

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databases. The biggest growth has come because of the music industry.

Those are the kind of things we need to look for. What are some of the industries that I think are really appropriate for us? First, I always like to think about my bank. I don't know how often you guys go through the door of your bank. I can't remember the last time I was in my bank building. That's because I bank at home using my PC or I bank at the grocery store.

What does banking at home equal for libraries? Well, remote access to our

services. What does banking in the grocery store represent for libraries? It makes us think about where are our service points are located. Where do people want to receive library services?

Let's look at the dot com companies and some of the things we can learn from those. I have many nieces and nephews and I order a lot of baby clothes and children's clothes from some companies. There's one company that always knows what I ordered last time. They know how long it's been since my last order and they suggest, based on the age group, things I might want to think about. If I ordered stuff for a three-year-old a year ago, they give me information on stuff for four-year-olds when I log on a year later because they know what I'm going to want.

Amazon.com is famous for this, of course. They know what you've read before and they suggest things that you might like to read. In libraries, that's a reader's advisory type of service. But they are able to harness the technology to do that kind of thing, whereas we in libraries rely more on our personal relationship.

Healthcare -- if only children had the good will to get ill between eight and five we could always get the

information we need! But they usually get sick at night, and these nurse hotlines that run twenty-four hours a day are invaluable. What does that equal for libraries? 24 by 7 reference. Same kind of need.

Grocery stores ... self check out. Well, what does that mean for libraries? Self check out. Many libraries already have that. I used the self-check out at our grocery store once, it was such a bad experience, I'll never do it again. If you don't do everything right, it speaks to you really loudly and tells

everyone what you did wrong. I hate to say it but I think that's for younger people than me.

But anyway, there is a lesson for us to learn there. Every encounter we have with industries outside our own industries are opportunities to think about what was good about that encounter that would apply to us; what was bad about that encounter that might apply to us.

I'll give you an example of a bad encounter. I recently navigated a website for something I was desperate to find information on. It turned out that I first had to figure out how the company was organized to be able to find the information because it was hidden under the department names for which I had no idea. So then I thought, Gee, I wonder if we do that at SOLINET? I looked at our website and everything was organized by department names. You needed to know that if you wanted a database, you had to look in SOLINET's library product and services section on our website. So that was a lesson we learned. We've reorganized our website now so that you don't need to know anything about us internally. So again, you can learn a lot about encounters elsewhere that might make you look at your own operation more closely.

The third thing I would like to say about keeping up, in addition to keeping up with library technology and with other industries, is keeping up with the communities we serve. The recent information that came out of the US Census, in terms of language and ethnic groups, is really an eye-opener for many public libraries who have a very rapidly changing community that they serve.

For those of us in academic libraries, we have many other ways that we can keep in touch with our users, including such questions as where are they located, are they mobile, are they electronically connected, what languages matter to them, and what are their age groups?

I heard a presentation from a library

that was doing 24/7 electronic references in a pilot for students. The librarians were doing it the way we librarians would naturally do it, typing

What I really mean here is to make integration of change a deep core value. Not so much changing because we must but changing because we want to. Because we want to be on top and because we want to think about the future.

complete sentences, grammatically correct, all the spelling was correct. The students at the other end were using this abbreviated kind of language, with short words and incomplete sentences. Students were frustrated with the time it took to get the answer. And I don't mean the research time. I mean the time when the words started appearing on the screen. So that is something about knowing your community and that's just one example.

Now if we're serving people who want information that way, who are used to abbreviating fast, then we need to think that way as well. And sometimes that's a challenge for us. Another example -- it's not really technology -- about how we need to change what we do is that I heard a presentation about a library who was doing end-user circulation. A person could check out a book from home and it would be sent to the user. The idea was to supplant the type of work that *Amazon.com* is doing where people pay for books to get them shipped home. The library didn't get the usage that they expected and they did focus groups. (Now it's nice to have a grant so you can do things like focus groups.) What they found is that people that used the services often didn't reuse it because, although they liked getting the books, the libraries shipped it in leftover used bags from interlibrary loan. Now I'm an old interlibrary loan librarian and I remember how you would tape over the holes in the jiffy bags where the stuffing was coming out and you would just cut your

fingers on the old staples cause that's just what you had to do to save a buck. What the people who were using the service said was that the quality of the

experience did not compare favorably with getting the books from *Amazon.com*.

Now admittedly they had the money to spend on it, not everybody does, but we have to think about what is the quality of the experience we are delivering and what can we learn from others who are delivering similar kinds of things. It may or may not be worth it. The library had to think about whether it was worth it for them to invest in the materials for shipping in a way that would give a quality experience. 'Cause I hate those old jiffy bags too.

Okay, the second piece of advice, in addition to keeping up with technology, is the need for us to integrate change into our libraries. It really needs to be an operational reality and I've talked about the pace of change and how profound it is. And you might all feel like I know I do when I think about SOLINET, Well gosh, we've integrated change! We have a website, we have PC's all over, remote access.

So why have I used the word integrate? What I really mean here is to make integration of change a deep core value. Not so much changing because we must but changing because we want to. Because we want to be on top and we want to think about the future. I don't know how many of you have read this wonderful article by Karen Hymen called "The Rule of 1965." Has anyone read that? I would really recommend it strongly. It's from the *American Libraries*, October 1999. She talks

about the importance in libraries for change to be embraced and welcomed. And her rule of 1965 is, and she's pretty harsh about this, but there's some truth, is that if libraries did it before 1965 we consider it standard operations and do it willingly and graciously. If it is something new, and she defines that as after 1965, we often do it in a way that is either begrudging or difficult for users to use. And that we really need to be embracing and making change more available. Now let me tell you some of the examples that she uses. First, and this is a quote, "You are caught by the rule of 1965 if your library treats twenty dollar videos, which came out since 1965, like the Hope diamond, with user fees and special loss or damage agreements, more restrictive than those for a seventy-five dollar book." I've been to public libraries in particular where that's the case. Because it's new and different somehow.

Another example she has, "You are in the rule of 1965 if your email reference service begins with a disclaimer like this one: 'While email allows you to transmit your request instantaneously, we cannot guarantee the speed of response. All questions transmitted to the library through email are downloaded once daily when time permits'. Now that's not really a gracious embracing of the possibility of new technology.

Now again, I think she's chosen examples that are way out there, but I think we should be thinking about that. We at SOLINET certainly, when I read this article, tried to confront the issue of our help desk. We gave priority at the help desk to the people who called on the phone, not people who sent an email. And for some people they don't have a separate phone line. In the library near the terminal it's hard for them to phone. They would really prefer to be responded to via email. Why did we place a value on phone over email? Well, email was new and new fangled and we had not thought it through. So I think that although her article is hard on librarians there is a lot

in it that is very interesting.

She has a quote in it that I wanted to read. "Having new machines is not the same as embracing new roles." We have the new machines; let's make sure in addition that we embrace the new roles. Now how do we go about doing that? We really need to create a climate in the library that supports change. This requires an investment of time, development of teamwork, evaluating our processes, looking at our reward systems, how people are recognized. All these things must work together. And you know we need to be rigorous in assessing potential change but not obstructionist. And that's a line that different people walk with different levels of comfort.

I have a friend that I worked with someplace that shall remain nameless up in Columbus, Ohio that said once after going through the fourth committee to get something approved, "That's it. I'll never have a good idea again."

Now we don't want to foster that feeling among the people who can help us make change. So we need to create that climate. We also need to redirect resources and rethink policies and programs that can be changed. We have new opportunities through the technology.

It's great if we have bigger budgets but we can't always have them. I think it's necessary for us to always look at the big picture, the status quo, and the potential opportunities in the same playing field, and choose based on our priorities today, not based on what we always done. This may mean discontinuing older services that are lower priorities.

Again, at OCLC when I worked

there, I had a boss who once said to me, "When the horse dies, dismount it." This is true. We all need to think about what horses we are riding that need to be dismounted.

The next piece of advice that I keep in mind when I am thinking about change in my own organization in libraries is the need to pursue partnerships. Library cooperation is a path to effectiveness with technology. We can realize things together that we can't realize as individuals. A database licensing is a great example. There much work being done in consortia to bring cheaper database licensing to libraries.

Cooperation is second nature to libraries. We as librarians were trained in that way. You know, I would like to think that we were into partnering before partnering was cool. All throughout the business world now there's a lot of work in the area of partnering. We should think of potential partners in several levels. We share commonality of purpose with many different communities.

First, with other libraries. Again we have a very strong base here, a high

We really need to create a climate in the library that supports change. This requires an investment of time, development of teamwork, evaluating our processes, looking at our reward systems, how people are recognized. All these things must work together.

level of trust. We often have worked out the rules of cooperation, so we know how to make it flow. We can extend the cooperative model that's in place for interlibrary loan, for database licensing, and for some cases for Atrial, into such areas as collection development, 24 by 7 reference, shared automated systems.

Library cooperation can also be used to share expertise. This to me is one of the great unrecognized benefits of cooperation: having

colleagues throughout your area, throughout the country, with whom you can share expertise. And I heard a couple examples of those when I was at the exhibit hall yesterday. One librarian stopped by and mentioned she had started using some OCLC services and that the best way for her to learn was to go to a colleague library and sit with the librarian there and watch how OCLC was used. A great example of cooperation. Unsung, but I think a great example.

Another person mentioned that his library was going to be buying a new local system. And he did a tour and visited five similar libraries to assess what was good and bad about their systems and get their expertise to help him make the selection. This group here with the ACL consortium is really a model for the kinds of cooperation that's possible as well as for the relationships that are built. I think libraries in general should ask themselves the question, "What are we trying to accomplish and can that be best accomplished cooperatively?" Some things can't. Some things are in the library as individual functions but can they be answered cooperatively.

Now beyond libraries, cooperation is very important. Partnering on campus is so critical. Partnering in the educational venture with such things as bibliographic instruction, electronic reserves, liaisons to academic departments to integrate information resources into the academic programs. Outreach to the faculty is critical. But also critical is partnering with the administration.

We have a most impressive example here at Trevecca University with the beautiful library that was built with the heavy involvement and support of the administration. It's a great example of how cooperation on campus can really further the information goals.

There are also other sources on

campus. I know that libraries aren't the only ones who maintain web pages. Often the recruiting areas will maintain web pages, the information office, and I don't mean to judgmental, but I believe that many of those kinds of websites could benefit from the organization and access skills of librarians. A perfect outreach opportunity to work together with those organizations.

Partnering is very important. I am always guided by a quote from Helen Keller, which I find inspirational, "Alone we can do so little, together we

I think the goals of libraries remain the same even with all the new technologies. We evaluate information; we acquire it, organize it, provide access, and preserve it for our communities. How we accomplish those things changes all the time.

can do so much." And I think that applies to libraries as well.

Okay, my next bit of advice for technology is, commit to lifelong learning. I don't know how many of you learned everything you needed to know in library school to run today's libraries. My example is always the one automation class that was offered where we did a punch card bibliography -- a skill I use almost daily in my current job! But it was good conceptually. So, it's really important for us to think about our own learning.

I think the goals of libraries remain the same even with all the new technologies. We evaluate information; we acquire it, organize it, provide access, and preserve it for our communities. How we accomplish those things changes all the time. Therefore this commitment to lifelong learning is very important for ourselves, for our library colleagues, those of us who are running library programs, I hope, look for opportunities for all of the staff to be educated and think about the future.

Also, we need to help our other communities with lifelong learning. Our academic colleagues need information about how to integrate information into their educational processes and how to use the tools that are available to them. A good example of this is a library-lead program to make dissertations and thesis available electronically over the web. A real advancement that some faculty have resistance to but libraries can't assist in that very important project.

Another group that we need to work on lifelong learning is with our colleagues and the administration who support the leadership we need. Again, we've seen this great example here. I like to tell the story of the library director I met once at a SOLINET meeting. He wanted some advice on how to deal with the administration because he had just put in a purchase order for a few

PC's and his Provost responded, "I bought the library microcomputers five years ago." Like why do you need more? So, there is clearly a learning opportunity needed there.

We need to assist those with whom we work and whom we depend on to have the same broad base of knowledge as we do so that we will be able to move effectively into the future. I think the intellectual curiosity that led us all to be librarians in the first place serves us well with lifelong learning.

So here are my bullets:

- Keep up with technology
- Integrate change
- Pursue partnerships
- Learn lifelong

My last bit of advice is that if libraries are going to be the strongest we can be using changing technology to serve our communities better, then we should seize the day! Thank you very much. *