LIBRARY JOURNAL.com
Visit *LJ* on the web!
www.libraryjournal.com

Designing Systems for All of Us

THE NATIONAL FEDERATION of Abstracting and Information Services (NFAIS) was founded to bring secondary publishers together to share common concerns. As I witnessed at the 45th annual NFAIS conference in February, secondary publishers these days are being joined by primary publishers, aggregators, and even a few consumers. Together, these constituents will determine the tenuous future of indexing and abstracting services. But first they have to determine just who their systems are designed for.

Simple or bells and whistles?

A recurring theme throughout the conference was what end users really want vs. what librarians want. These were often depicted as contrasting and incompatible. John Barnes, senior VP of business development with Gale, reminded the audience that "the buyer is not the user" in the library market, and while librarians want advanced search features, users "want simple." "If we are going to win back the user, it has to look like Google," Barnes said.

Derk Haank, CEO of Elsevier, explained that electronic publishing "is about linking and searching." Haank confidently asserted, "What people like is [quick], big, and always 'in the air' [available]. People are not looking for more bells and whistles—they want more content, and fast."

Dennis Norlin, executive director of the American Theological Library Association (ATLA), described how the ATLA Religion Database is available on multiple systems. Increased access is mostly positive, but the database does lose some functionality. Aggregator versions have fewer special features that exploit the unique content of the database, such as allowing sorting by canonical order. But "we are ready to sacrifice sophisticated search features to more links to full text," Norlin said. ATLA has not totally given up on special searching features—the association still produces a CD-ROM version that retains the special features.



Carol Tenopir
(ctenopir@utk.edu)
is Professor at the School of Information Sciences, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

> Librarians agree that users want more full texts

The librarian's viewpoint

Librarians agree that users want more full texts and that linking is an essential part of online services. But what other search and interface features are required is not so clear.

Swathmore College's Anne Garrison said that students want full text and may even change their topic to accommodate what they find in full text. But according to Garrison, head of reference services and humanities librarian, large megadatabases mean that students are "getting junky and peripheral full text" that they have to sift through. Instead of more articles of dubious quality, Garrison told the audience that academic librarians want full text in disciplines that haven't received much attention, such as humanities. They also want deep full text, with older materials and primary source materials—such as complete historical newspapers, with images and advertisements intact.

Garrison was emphatic in telling the producers of specialized indexes, like the MLA bibliography, that "you are not designing for the lowest common denominator but for upper-level undergraduates and graduate students." We "don't want [all systems] Googleized." She offered several specific suggestions to improve online systems and databases, including raising the level of basic searching in scholarly databases; standardizing the rules for adjacency and Boolean searching; not making users guess about vocabulary; making it easier to search by author and historical period; and being certain librarians know how to use your products.

Janice Keeler, global external content manager, Accenture, represented special librarians. She reminded the producers that their systems need functions for both—"a combination of simplicity and power tools." She specifically needs to customize source selection, interfaces, and searching power for different users.

Since many libraries are dropping print subscriptions for electronic versions, Gale's Barnes drew several "product lessons" for the content creators in the audience. He advised library publishers to provide targeted, subject-specific products rather than "data dumps." Linking and partnerships with other publishers are needed for library users to move easily among various products. Creating tools that will allow personalization, creating virtual communities of users is the next step.

Working together

Designing systems that serve both librarians and end users remains a necessity because information content providers rely on librarians to make their products available to the public. Barnes reminded the audience that nearly half of all academic or public libraries are facing budget cuts—which directly affects publishers whose main customers are libraries. Barnes emphasized that publishers and libraries are part of a shared community and in a long-term relationship. Companies should play an advocacy role for libraries and help librarians market themselves better. When libraries are better funded, "we all win."

When librarians, publishers, and aggregators come together to share ideas we are all winners. System designs shouldn't be a them vs. us proposition—end users, librarians, aggregators, and content providers are all in this together. Good systems should meet everyone's needs.