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ONLINE DATABASES

Hidden Conference Gems

By Carol Tenopir

After 27 years of writing ten columns per year, starting this month I will be cutting back to just five per year, in addition to the annual Database Marketplace. My next column will appear in January. From now on, I will concentrate on covering e-content conferences that may not be on your radar.

SUMMER IS THE TIME FOR PROFESSIONAL conferences. Every librarian knows about the biggest ones—held by the Special Libraries Association (SLA), American Library Association, and International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)—which attract thousands. For those interested in e-content, however, some alternatives provide an opportunity to learn and share in a more intimate environment.

This summer I attended two such gems in the UK—the third Bloomsbury Conference on E-Publishing and E-Publications in London and the 11th Fiesole Collection Development Retreat, this year held in Glasgow, Scotland. Both bring together publishers and librarians in equal numbers and, with just under 100 participants, provide lots of opportunities to discuss vital e-content issues.

Beyond books and journals

The Bloomsbury conference in June (bit.ly/nG240) was organized by the Centre for Publishing/Department of Information Studies at University College London. This year's theme, "Beyond Books and Journals," recognized that e-journal and ebook collections are now mainstream in libraries and challenged attendees to think about what librarians and publishers should concentrate on next.

Much of the discussion centered on digital datasets, either linked to peer-reviewed journal articles or as stand-alone content in institutional or subject repositories. Research agencies are prioritizing the collection, standardization, and preservation of digital data. In the United States, the National Science Foundation's

Division of Cyberinfrastructure's DataNet grants will help librarians and scientists work together on the challenges of data.

Bloomsbury participants discussed how libraries and publishers strive, in collaborating closely with scientists, to make data both findable and usable. Some, such as Liz Lyon, director of the UKOLN digital research group, University of Bath, envisioned datasets made available independently of other publica-

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tions. Others, such as Toby Greene, head of publishing, Public Affairs and Communications Directorate, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in Paris, described data as an integral and linked part of publications.

Reshaping library content

The 11th annual Fiesole Collection Development Retreat (bit.ly/O87ex), held in July, takes its name from the Tuscan town where the conference began. Fiesole, near Florence, is the home of the book and serials provider Casalini Libri, which still helps support the meeting.

It's an international (and much smaller) version of the wildly successful Charleston Conference, held each November in South Carolina. The goal of Fiesole is open discussion, so controversial topics and differences of opinion are embraced. This year's theme was "Reshaping Library Content: Building e-Collections and Accessing Global Resources." As with Bloomsbury, a focus was how changes in scholarship fostered by technology alter collections and services.

Many speakers expressed concern about money spent on digitizing ephemeral resources that are seldom used, duplicated in print, and difficult to sustain. One (albeit controversial) measure of value is amount of use—in which case libraries and publishers must choose dig-

itization projects carefully and then help drive users to the content by developing better tools, applications, and links that bring related content together.

Others urged libraries to put into institutional repositories unique born-digital content such as course materials, data, and pieces from early stages of the research process, rather than duplicating the journal publication system by focusing on peer-reviewed articles.

Responsibility remains

Retreat participants recognized that journals and books are just one small part of a library's responsibility—a theme that was also prominent at Bloomsbury. Whether we call this material "grey literature," "research products," or something else entirely, librarians and publishers are developing ways to extend it into scholarship. One challenge is to consider the scholarly endeavor as more of a "river than a lake," as expressed by Fiesole speaker Peter Nicholson, president of the Council of Canadian Academies: something that changes quickly and continually.

Gordon Tibbets, CEO of bepress, described this as a "continuum of scholarly content in context" that comes before and after articles. Librarians and publishers must expand their awareness beyond just the traditional journal and book artifacts, setting each element in its proper place on this continuum.

These small conferences bring together participants from multiple information-related sectors and offer time for discussion and contemplation. Most important, they stretch our thinking to examine new roles and enhanced collaborations.

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