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Google Meets Publishers and Librarians

Text and photos

by **DONALD T. HAWKINS**

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Google Meets Publishers and Librarians

Text and photos by DONALD T. HAWKINS

Google's objective may be to make knowledge available to everyone, but just how well is it fulfilling that mission, and how are its activities impacting the information industry, especially publishers and librarians? That was the core of a forum titled Google, the Web, and the Future Roles of Publishers and Librarians, sponsored by NFAIS and hosted by The iSchool at Drexel.

About 60 attendees were present for the meeting, which was bracketed with a keynote address by Stephen Arnold, pres-



Stephen Arnold, president of Arnold Information Technology, introduced the pervading influence of Google during the NFAIS forum on Google, the Web, and the Future Roles of Publishers and Librarians.



In his endnote, Roy Tennant, senior program officer at OCLC programs and research, discussed three key challenges in shaping the future.

ident of Arnold Information Technology, and an endnote by Roy Tennant, senior program officer at OCLC Programs and Research. Additional speakers representing content providers, abstracting-and-indexing services, and libraries discussed how Google has affected them. As a special feature to this event, those not attending the forum could do so virtually (see sidebar).

Google: Past, Present, and Future

Although Google is a secretive company, it has patented many of its inventions and therefore has publicly disclosed much of its technology. Arnold, who has done an exhaustive study of Google's patents, inferred some of its business strategies from these patents and has authored several books on his findings, the latest of which is titled *Google: The Digital Gutenberg*. Arnold's research shows that Google has moved beyond a search engine to play an influential and complex role in the information industry.

In his keynote, Arnold said that Google has become a disruptive force in many industries. Its platform includes content intake, management, assembly, and delivery, as well as monetization and usage tracking. Advances in technology now permit Google to convert any analog material into digital form. Google's most notable use of advanced scanning technology is in its Google Books project, which is scanning the contents of some of the world's most prominent libraries. Though Google Books has benefited scholars and users, the resulting images are a

byproduct of the process. Arnold said that the real purpose of Google's digitization program is to build a knowledgebase and generate metadata that can be used to develop new products and lead to enhanced revenue opportunities.

Although Google's effect on the market is pervasive and far-reaching, there are niches where its "free, but good enough" philosophy is not appropriate, such as medicine, chemical structures, law, and engineering. In these areas, opportunities exist for other content organizations to enter the market successfully.

Google Use by Researchers

As Google's popularity grew, library usage declined. A recent ProQuest study of college students found that students usually go to Google first, even though libraries are credible resources of information. However, Google still has disadvantages:

- Google has no metadata to allow filtering search results.
- Search algorithms can be artificially affected by SEO.
- Information on what is actually being searched is not available.
- Content retrieved in a Google search may be difficult to access.

Although librarians still view their roles as important, users see these roles declining and often misunderstand librarians' roles in accessing electronic resources.

In the corporate world, where security is a major issue, Google Toolbar interferes with some firewall software, according to Nancy L. Klein, product support specialist at GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), where company researchers often use Google Scholar.

The NFAIS Forum also included a user's firsthand experiences. Hasan Ayaz,

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Google Meets Publishers and Librarians

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a Ph.D. candidate in Drexel's School of Biomedical Engineering, Science & Health Systems, described his use of Google Scholar. Ayaz said he likes Google Scholar because it is one of the few search services that presents citation information along with the reference, and if a library has registered its holdings with Google, it provides one-click access to the full text.

Opportunities for Content Providers and Abstracting-and-Indexing Services

Google also provides a valuable referral service for content providers, according to Terry Hulbert, American Institute of Physics' (AIP) director of business development, who notes that 44% of AIP's web traffic results from referrals, 15% of which come from Google Scholar.

Now that users have progressed beyond simple searching, abstracting-and-indexing companies may take on a special role. A trio of representatives from abstracting-and-indexing services believes these services will continue but in a different way in this open world. Jim Pringle, vice president of product development at Thomson Reuters, said it's now important to provide links to mate-



Linda Beebe, senior director at PsycINFO, explored several ways that value is created from abstracting-and-indexing services.

rial that will focus users' attention on what they want to know.

Information providers now need to understand what professional users want, what role they play in their organizations, and what information is necessary for them to succeed. Linda Beebe, senior director at PsycINFO, listed some of the following value provided by abstracting-and-indexing services:

- They provide vetting by trained professionals with subject knowledge.
- Abstracts and indexes contain unbiased reports of the literature, so searchers can find essential elements and key facts in an article.
- Structure content with multiple fields allows filtering of results.
- Many abstracting-and-indexing services have had a long existence, so they offer continuity. For example, records in the inaugural edition of PsycINFO (published in 1895) are still available.

Libraries: Value Beyond Google

By changing their value proposition, corporate and academic librarians are trying to attract users, but competing with Google is difficult. Anne Prestamo, associate dean of libraries for collection and technology services at Oklahoma State University, reported that few searches are done using content provider portals, and searches in discipline-specific databases have decreased. Librarians can counter this trend by registering their link resolvers with Google Scholar, so a direct link to the library appears in search results. This way, users can continue discovery through the federated search connection.

A Challenging Future

In his endnote, Roy Tennant challenged attendees to shape the future. Google and

Amazon have moved into roles formerly reserved for libraries and traditional publishers; Amazon has become a leader in selling books, while Google has the edge on online advertising.

Tennant sees the following three challenges:

- **Abstracting-and-indexing-only services are dead.** He says there is no business for just creating metadata. In an all-digital content creation process, metadata is generated free when users fill out forms. New search algorithms have made metadata less essential, and Google Scholar has demonstrated what can be done without it.
- **Traditional publishers are circling the drain.** According to Tennant, about 268,000 print books were published in 2008, but a single online publisher (Lulu) published 400,000 books. More than 2,000 journals now use the platform of the Public Knowledge Project (PKP; <http://pkp.sfu.ca>) to produce their publications. Scholarly publications perform registration, dissemination, archiving, and certification roles.
- **Libraries are in danger.** People used to think of libraries when they thought of books. Now an entire generation goes directly to Google Books. Libraries started as a way to share scarce resources, but today, users expect information to be delivered to them. To survive, libraries need to connect to the community at the network level on a web scale to draw people to their local collections.

Donald T. Hawkins is information technology and database consultant at Information Today, Inc. His email address is dthawkins@verizon.net. Send your comments about this article to itletters@infotoday.com.